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THE MASTER-KEY

“ Love is the Master Key that opens every ward of the heart of man ”

THE MASTER-KEY

BY

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THE MASTER-KEY



CHAPTER I

THE SHADOW ON DRAKE'S HALL

DRAKE'S HALL was an ancient mansion of rich red brick, picturesquely placed on the slope of a low hill, overlooking the little stream of the Somersetshire Avon, and embowered in trees whose leaves were just beginning to lose their summer green and to assume the fuller, more varied tints of autumn.

There was a sort of hush about the place. The gardeners, instead of busying themselves with their work, stood about in knots and groups ; the stables, which had been wont to be the liveliest, noisiest corner of all the stately place, were silent and deserted.

A fortnight before, the master of Drake's Hall, Lord Shelvin, had been carried to his last resting-place ; and already the horses he had loved so well had been sent away to Tattersall's to be sold ; and

the gardens in which he had taken so great a pride were showing the absence of a sharp eye at the head of the household.

Along the low, battlemented front of the house, the Tudor windows, peeping out of the well-trimmed ivy, seemed to look out upon the scene, which had undergone so great, yet so indefinable a change, like eyes which had lost the power of sight.

For the new Lord Shelvin was just three months old, and his mother, most gentle, lovely, but helpless of guardians, was a girl-widow of only twenty years of age.

In the Long Gallery, the stateliest apartment in all the stately mansion, Lady Shelvin, the late viscount's mother, was sitting with her favourite nephew, Captain Garrington, a handsome, well-built man of about thirty, whose bold blue eyes had a charm for most women which made them blind to the cold, callous, heartless nature which, to a more discriminating eye, they betrayed.

His aunt, like most of her sex, adored him. No sooner was her son in his coffin than she gave permission to Captain Garrington, who had been forbidden the house in his cousin's lifetime, to come and stay with her in the family mansion.

Hugh Garrington had not been slow to avail himself of the invitation.

And now, after luncheon, on a brilliant October afternoon, he half sat, half reclined on a low settee

opposite to the high-backed chair where his aunt sat, blinking lazily at the fire, and watching the struggle between the languid flames on the hearth and the piercing, slanting rays of the already declining sun.

"This is a lovely room, aunt! How well I remember it when I was a little chap!" said he, after a long silence, in the soft caressing voice which he generally used to women, a voice which usually had an irresistible fascination for them.

"Ah!" said old Lady Shelvin, who, in her deep black, with her clear-cut face, which looked like old ivory in a frame of silver hair, had a look as of an old picture descended from its frame, "That was before you got into disgrace, Hugh! You had no one but yourself to thank for your exile."

"Oh, aunt! is it you I hear? Really you, who always used to take the part of your scapegrace nephew?"

And he crossed from the settee to an old-fashioned carved chair beside her, and throwing himself into it in an attitude of plaintive entreaty, looked up appealingly into her eyes.

A very faint smile flitted over Lady Shelvin's face. She had not been used to these deferential tones and looks. Lord Shelvin, her son, upright and just, had been also stern and unbending, and under his sway old Lady Shelvin had had to take a place in the background, to which she had never, in all the

twenty years of her widowhood, got accustomed. It was in a very indulgent voice that she answered her nephew, shaking her head in gentle reproach.

"I have taken your part, certainly, as strongly as I could. I have spoken up for you, made excuses for you. But really your extravagance——"

"Extravagance!" echoed Hugh, not angrily, but in a tone of the gentlest reproach. "Now how could I, my father's son, and in a crack regiment, be anything else but what you call extravagant? I haven't been more extravagant than I could help! Would you have had me go about town on the top of an omnibus, get my clothes at a second-rate tailor's, or live in a back room over an oil-shop? Now, aunt, tell me that!"

"I would have had you," answered his aunt, not at all harshly, "live within your allowance, which was a very fair one. Greville was always just."

"Just! Do you call it just for him to marry, when he was over fifty, and I had got used to the natural expectation of being his heir?"

Under all his easy good-humour of manner the bitterness peeped out as he spoke. Lady Shelvin shrugged her shoulders.

"It was foolish of him to marry, no doubt," said she, in a tone which betrayed, in its turn, how distasteful this step on her son's part had been to her. "At least, it was foolish to marry so late, and so—well, so unexpectedly."

"Lady Liliass was young enough to have been his daughter, wasn't she?"

"Yes, yes. He was thirty-five years older than she! It was an absurd difference!"

"Did they get on well together?"

"Oh, yes, if you call it well," said Lady Shelvin, grudgingly, "for a man of Greville's age to go mad about a mere child, whose intelligence he could certainly not respect; a girl with no force of character, no strength of mind whatever!"

It crossed Hugh's mind that perhaps his cousin had had enough of strong-willed, strong-charactered women in his domestic life, and that the sweet, yielding Lady Liliass might have seemed not the less admirable for the contrast she made to his lynx-eyed, masculine-voiced mother. "Where did he meet her?"

"At a hunt breakfast, at her father's place in Norfolk—Hillingham Towers. He fell in love with her on the spot, and carried her off from the man she was fond of, but whom her father did not wish her to marry. Fancy the force of character of a girl who will let herself be disposed of like that," ended Lady Shelvin, scornfully.

"But she didn't pine away for the loss of her first love!" pursued Captain Garrington, interested.

"Oh, dear, no. She's one of those backboneless creatures whom any one who tries can do what he likes with! And she was fond of her husband in her way, I've no doubt."

"He's left her well provided for, of course?" said Captain Garrington, musingly.

"Oh, dear, yes. He has considered no one else, by comparison. Her jointure will cripple the estate, positively cripple it, all through the child's minority."

"And will she live here?"

"She must live here," retorted Lady Shelvin sharply. "She must spend her income on the estate, and not be simply a burden upon it."

"She will marry again, probably," said Captain Garrington, with a quick glance at his aunt which she did not see. He was feeling his way. "Does her allowance cease if she marries again?" he asked, with affected carelessness.

But Lady Shelvin's eyes were sharp; and at this question she frowned.

"Surely," she said, with some reserve in her tone, "it can have no particular interest for you, Hugh, whether your cousin's widow marries again or not?"

"I am interested in anything that affects you, or the estate that I always thought was to have been mine, or my young cousin, aunt," answered Captain Garrington quickly. As she said nothing, he added, after a short pause, "Lady Liliass seems to resent my being here. During the three days I've been here I've scarcely got more than a side-view of her face, and that only for a moment at a time."

"You can hardly complain of that, in the circum-

stances," said Lady Shelvin. "She has scarcely been a widow three weeks yet! If it were not for your close relation to the family, your presence would seem strange to everybody so soon after Greville's death. But I own I am not equal to the task of seeing myself to all that has to be done. There is so much in the stables, for instance, to be settled, that a woman cannot undertake herself."

Captain Garrington raised his eyebrows.

"I had heard," said he, "that Lady Lilius was as much interested in hunting and horses as Greville himself?"

"But she cannot attend to that sort of thing just now," retorted Lady Shelvin sharply. "There are decencies to be considered."

"Oh! Then it was you who ordered the sale of the horses?"

"Certainly. Those things cannot be brought before the notice of a young thing like Lilius at such a time!"

"I see. She is supposed, for the present, to be incapable of the slightest exertion, as well as invisible!" said Hugh, with a dry look.

"She will be visible presently, when the baby makes his appearance," said Lady Shelvin. "If you will touch that bell, Hugh, the nurse will bring little Greville to see me.. You haven't had a good look at him yourself yet."

"No, I haven't. I've caught fleeting glimpses of a

long white fluffy parcel being hastily whisked along corridors and in and out of rooms, but that can hardly be styled a close acquaintance. What if I were to go and escort him downstairs? I know the way to the nursery; I've discovered the apartment by the mysterious squeaks my cousin utters over his bottle, and the singular diddle-iddle-chuck-chuck-chuck language in which I hear the nurses converse with him as I pass the door."

Lady Shelvin laughed.

"Very well. Go up if you like, and tell nurse to bring him down to me, whatever Lady Lillas says."

"All right, aunt."

Captain Garrington was at the door when his aunt called him back.

"By the by, Hugh, did you take my message to the head keeper this morning?"

"Yes, aunt. I went straight to his cottage after breakfast, and gave your message to a little plump white-toothed person, whom I took for his wife, but who turned out to be his sister."

"I hope you won't take any notice of her, Hugh," said Lady Shelvin in a tone of annoyance. "She is a forward young person, with ideas above her station. The way she dresses on Sunday is simply a scandal. I've spoken to Mallory about it; but he spoils her."

"I hate that Mallory!" said Captain Garrington. "He's such a self-assertive rascal. Now that's the

member of the family whom I call presuming ! He would be out of the place in two minutes if I were master here !”

Just for one fleeting moment there passed over Captain Garrington's face a look which it was lucky for him that his aunt did not see : so full of baffled malignity, of rage, of hate, of savage disappointment, that his features, so easily good-humoured a moment before, looked like a hideous mask, distorted by evil, ugly passions.

Lady Shelvin shrugged her shoulders slightly.

“ Jack Mallory is a most faithful servant,” she said. “ Greville, your cousin, had the highest opinion of him. He treated him, indeed, as a personal friend.”

“ Ah, and that's been the ruin of the beggar !” said Captain Garrington, lightly. “ It's encouraged him to take liberties. Old servants who are old are bad enough to deal with ; but an old servant who is still a young man, why, aunt, I can't tell you what I think about that sort of animal without using language unfit for you to hear !”

And, with a laugh, to which Lady Shelvin replied by a good-humoured little shake of the head, he left the room.

At the end of the long corridor into which the gallery opened, was the great hall of the house, wide and lofty, with oak-panelled walls, and a carved oak staircase which was one of the sights of the mansion. The floor, of polished oak, was spread with oriental

rugs ; while trophies of war and the chase, spears, old swords, helmets and breastplates, mounted heads of bison and of stag, hung on the dark walls among full-length portraits of dead and gone Shelvins, who had hunted and fought, made love, lived, married and died, from the days of the Tudors.

Just as Captain Garrington emerged from the corridor, a procession reached the bottom of the staircase, and announced to him the fact that his errand was a useless one.

The head nurse, a portly person in a state dress of black silk, came first with her precious charge, the baby Lord Shelvin. Behind her followed the under-nurse, a bright-faced, giggling girl, Emily by name. And by her side came Hannah Mallory, the gamekeeper's sister, whom Captain Garrington had met at her brother's cottage that morning.

On his first sight of the procession, Captain Garrington came quickly forward and waylaid the nurse.

"Now, Nurse," cried he, in a gay and careless manner which went straight to the hearts of all three women, "I'm not going to allow you to escape this time. You've waved that fluffy white bundle persistently in my face ever since my arrival, yet I've not once been allowed to see inside. Now, on my soul, I begin to doubt whether you have got a baby there at all. I begin to think it's just clothes and nothing else ; and that you're all in a con-

spiracy to do me out of the property by false pretences !”

Hannah and Emily tittered with appreciation all the time he spoke ; and Hannah in particular cast at him many languishing glances. She was a pretty, dark-haired girl, frivolous and vain ; and she had been delighted with Captain Garrington's easy flattery that morning.

The head nurse, however, a more serious person, was at first inclined to be a little offended by the suggestion.

“ I'm sure, sir, there's no wish on anybody's part to do anything by false pretences,” said she, earnestly. “ You could have seen his lordship any time, if you had liked to come up to the nursery. But I thought you didn't care for babies, sir. Many gentlemen don't !”

The Captain drew a comically long face.

“ Many gentlemen,” said he dolefully, “ don't have so much reason for looking askance at babies as I have ! Oh, you little pink-faced, pulpy morsel of humanity,” he cried in a tragic tone, as the nurse uncovered the baby's face, and exposed to view the face of the infant viscount, “ what have you done, that you should be born so lucky ? Why should you be cuddled and petted, and sung to and worshipped ? Why, above all, should you be growing up to twenty thousand a year and a few other delightful little things such as titles and family

mansions, while your poor, deserving old cousin has to scrape along as best he can, and think himself lucky if he can just keep his miserable head above water ? Oh, baby, tell me, tell me why this is thus ?”

And as he spoke, Captain Garrington, who had been rattling on in a mock-dismal manner to an accompaniment of sympathetic giggles and sighing murmurs from the two girls, and deprecatory shakes of the head from the head nurse, suddenly snatched the baby out of her arms, and held him aloft, looking appealingly into his small pink face, and uttering deep groans of mock-misery.

Hannah and Emily uttered faint little screams, half of surprise and half of amusement. The nurse was almost too much astonished to do anything but stare. She recognised, however, that the Captain's hand was strong and his touch sure, and that the child would come to no harm in his keeping. She also, therefore, though rather disturbed by this piece of levity, tried to smile, and only put a proprietary hand upon the baby's long garments, as they floated in the air.

The Captain, amusing himself in amusing his audience, went on in a more tragic tone than ever.

“Oh, Lord Shelvin, why don't you answer me ? Why don't I spend my time in the arms of an amiable and devoted woman, as you do ?”

The head nurse lost her slight frown, and smiled instead.

"Why don't I have charming young creatures waiting upon me all day long?"

Here Emily and Hannah exchanged glances, and giggled together.

"Why, in short, is life all kicks for me, and all halfpence for you? Tell me that, oh, Lord Shelvin, I pray you tell me that! To think that you, nothing more solid and substantial than you, stand before me and fortune!"

To the girls, even to the middle-aged woman, all this was the easiest, the most light-hearted banter, the amusing lament of a good-humoured, careless fellow, who took life easily, and was too shallow-natured to think deeply about that, or about anything else.

But Captain Garrington had another listener, one he neither saw nor heard, but upon whom every word, every gesture of his produced a strong, a terrible impression.

Down the wide oak staircase, with the afternoon sunlight shining through the diamond-paned window above upon her silky fair hair, Lady Lillas, the slender girl-widow, was coming, by slow steps, as he talked. Her plain black gown, severely simple in cut, made her look slighter and more childish than ever; while the tiny widow's cap looked strangely, tragically out of place on her bright, soft hair.

She was very pale, with dark rings under her

large blue eyes, rings that told of sleepless nights and heavy days. Her little red mouth, less like a woman's than a child's, was slightly open, as she drew her breath quickly, and descended slowly, watching Captain Garrington's face with a keen, frightened look as she did so.

Nobody saw her. The three women had their backs turned to the staircase; while Captain Garrington, whose eyes were fixed upon the baby, presented his profile only to the view of Lady Liliás.

When he seized the child and held it up aloft, Lady Liliás stopped and held her breath. The next moment, descending upon him like a whirlwind, she snatched the infant from him, and clasped it to her own breast.

She did not utter a word. But the action, the manner in which she performed it, were so eloquent of fear and horror, that all the onlookers, including Captain Garrington himself, were aghast.

For a few seconds no one spoke. Then the head nurse came forward, offering to take the child; and Captain Garrington, stammering a little and trying to laugh, addressed the angry, frightened mother—

“Lady Liliás, I'm sure you don't think I was doing any harm to your child! The baby was safe, perfectly safe!”

But Lady Liliás, pale and passionate, turned upon him sharply—

"Not with you ! Not while you are in the house !"

There was a moment's breathless pause. Captain Garrington stepped back with a muttered exclamation. The two servants and Hannah Mallory drew together, shocked and scandalised.

In the hush that fell upon them all, Lady Shelvin's voice, from the entrance to the long corridor, rang out, sharp and clear, startling them all—

"Lilias, don't be ridiculous ! Give the child back to its nurse. And Hugh, don't make an exhibition of yourself, pray !"

CHAPTER II

A FAITHFUL FRIEND

“TAKE the baby into the Long Gallery, Nurse,” went on Lady Shelvin, in her coldest, most cutting tones. “And who is this?”

As she spoke, she raised her gold double-eyeglass, and stared coldly at Hannah, who, though by no means so much abashed as the others, was a little put out of countenance by this very marked reception.

“I—I—I came up, my lady,” said she, raising her eyebrows and lowering her eyelids with as pert an air as she dared to use, “to—to tell you that I gave your message to my brother, and that he’ll be up to speak to your ladyship this afternoon.”

“There was no need for you to come up to tell me that,” said Lady Shelvin icily.

She turned abruptly away, and with a gesture to her nephew to follow her, returned to the Long Gallery.

Lady Lilius had already disappeared, flitting noiselessly upstairs while Hannah was speaking.

Hannah, as soon as the ladies had turned their

backs, made a demure grimace, looking at Captain Garrington with sly eyes. The invitation was enough for him. Disregarding his aunt's injunction, and trusting to his own powers to make it right with her afterwards, he lingered in the hall, listening with amusement to the girl's pert sallies, and making her, in return, the grossly flattering speeches which girls of her type are ready to absorb with avidity.

"What made you come up here this afternoon?" asked he at last, bending his head till it was very near to her bold, black eyes, and even daring to touch her shoulder with the tips of his fingers.

"Why, I came to see the baby, of 'course!" said she, giggling.

"Confound the baby!" replied the Captain sharply, between his teeth. "If it were not for that little miserable brat, I should be Lord Shelvin, and able to—to——" He stepped back a little, and gave her a bold stare of much meaning, "to make handsome presents, and to enjoy life!"

"Why, that's just what I've been saying, and all the girls," answered Hannah readily, "what a shame it seems that you, who would be such a splendid master for the place, as different as possible from Lord Shelvin that's gone, that you should be turned out—and just at the last, too!"

"It's just my luck!" cried Captain Garrington, shrugging his shoulders, but with a rather wry face. "However, I shall be about the place a good deal,

I expect, and I hope I shall see a good deal of you, eh, Miss Mallory?"

And again he came very near. She giggled once more.

"I don't know about that," said she, with a dubious shake of the head, which was not meant to be too discouraging. "My brother looks after me pretty sharply, I can tell you! If he was to catch me here this afternoon, he'd be sure to say"—and she ogled the Captain frankly—"that it wasn't the baby brought me here!"

"And who was it, eh?" asked Captain Garrington, with his arm round her waist.

Before he could take the kiss he wanted, Hannah drew herself sharply away from him, as a heavy tread sounded in the passage under the staircase which led from the servants' quarters.

"It's him! I must get away!" cried she, in a frightened whisper.

But before she could do more than retreat a few steps, the door at the back opened, and Jack Mallory came in.

A handsome, stalwart young fellow, with a fresh, open face, honest grey eyes, and crisply curling brown hair, Jack Mallory, the head gamekeeper, in his corduroys and gaiters, looked as fine a specimen of English manhood as you could find in the kingdom. His step was firm, his eyes were bright; and his every movement, his every gesture, was full of

the grace which belongs to healthy, well-trained, vigorous manhood.

Hating the man for his sturdy independence, and for the honesty which made Jack look askance at the visitor to whom his late master had refused admittance to his house, Captain Garrington was forced to admit, as he looked at the young game-keeper, that he was one of the finest-looking men he had ever seen.

But Jack looked stern and angry, as his eyes travelled quickly from the Captain to his own sister, who put a bold face on it, and said at once—

“I’ve been to see the baby, Jack.”

“Ah!” said Jack Mallory, shortly, in a deep, musical voice, the right voice for such a man. “And now you’d better go home!”

“All right! You needn’t speak like that. There’s no harm in wanting to see the young master.”

But her brother made no answer to this, except by a gesture of command so imperative that Hannah, with a toss of the head, and a side-glance of malice at the Captain, thought it best to take the advice he offered, and to retreat by the way he had come.

When she had gone, Captain Garrington, sitting on the edge of one of the hall-tables, as he took out a pouch and made himself a cigarette, laughed disagreeably.

“You’re so used to living among animals, Mallory,

that I suppose you get into the way of talking to human beings as if they were on the same level!" drawled he, as Jack, on his way to the Gallery, stopped, with a sort of respectfulness which was on the surface only, to listen to him.

"Some of them are!" he answered rather sullenly.

"Oh! Your sister, for instance?"

"No. Some of her—acquaintances."

There was something in his tone which jarred mightily on the sensitive nerves of the Captain. He betrayed his annoyance in his next speech—

"Are you allowed to wander over the house at your own sweet will, Mallory? Outdoor servants are not usually accorded such privileges!"

His tone was offensive in the extreme; but the mention of the privilege in question recalled his late master to the gamekeeper's mind; and it was in a voice full of emotion that he replied—

"My master, sir, treated me better than any other master ever treated any man!"

And then, as Captain Garrington had nothing to say to this, he went on, with a cold salute, in the direction of the Long Gallery. Before he had reached the corridor, however, Lady Lillas, with light and rapid steps, flew down the staircase after him.

But at the foot of the stairs she was intercepted by Captain Garrington, who placed himself in her

way, and, looking up with all the tenderness he could manage to throw into his eyes, said, in his lowest, tenderest tone—

“Lady Liliás, one moment, listen !”

She had become in an instant as still as a statue, and almost as white. Erect, motionless, she stood on the bottom stair, and, with averted head, listened to his next words.

“Lady Liliás, you have given me to-day the cruellest shock I have ever received in my life ! I have thought of nothing else ever since. Is it possible that you ever really thought—dreamt—imagined, that I could wish to harm your child, my cousin ! I cannot, I will not believe that you did !”

Lady Liliás, still with averted eyes, answered in a constrained, troubled voice—

“I was foolish, of course. I am sorry if—if I said anything to hurt you !”

But there was no apology in her tone, though her words were conciliatory enough. She looked towards the entrance of the corridor, and moved impatiently.

Captain Garrington drew back.

“You came down to see young Mallory ? Shall I call him back ?”

His look and tone were full of covert offence ; and Lady Liliás blushed.

“No, thank you,” said she coldly. “I can speak to him presently.”

"He is privileged," said Captain Garrington, with a sneer.

"He was my husband's most trusted servant," said she with a little piteous contraction of the brows. "More than a servant—a friend."

"I don't wonder at your preference for him, Lady Liliás."

She threw at him a quick glance, eloquent not only of dislike, but of fear. Then, with a slight bend of the head, but without another word, she passed him, and disappeared into the corridor.

On the opposite side to the Long Gallery, there was a wide conservatory, lofty and long, with baskets of moss and trailing flowers hanging from the roof, banks of rich blossom on either side.

Lady Liliás, a strange and sad contrast in her heavy black dress, to the dazzling colours around her, went in and waited for the opening of the door of the Long Gallery.

In about ten minutes' time Jack Mallory came out. He caught sight at once of the beautiful girlish face through the glass side of the conservatory, and his features softened with pity as he looked.

"Come in here, Mallory," said she, in a voice scarcely louder than a whisper, skimming across the carpeted floor to the door to invite him in.

The young keeper entered at once, and stood in the cold yellow light of the October afternoon, cap in hand, before his late master's young widow. It

was the first time that he had seen her, except for a fleeting glimpse on the day of the funeral, since Lord Shelvin's death.

He was deeply touched by the change which a few short weeks had made in the gay child-wife who had been her husband's idol: the wild look in her great blue eyes struck him with a nameless fear. That she had something of deep import to say to him he felt sure. But when she spoke, he was startled beyond measure.

"Mallory," said she, in a hoarse whisper, as she led him into a corner of the conservatory where a tall screen would hide them from chance eyes in the corridor, "I am wretched, mad with misery and alarm. And I have no friend here but *you*. I must speak to *you*!"

"My lady!" stammered Jack, looking at her with alarm, and at once springing to the conjecture that grief had injured her reason.

She guessed what was the thought in his mind.

"No, no," she said, solemnly and earnestly, stretching out one hand as if entreating him to listen, to believe her, "I know what I'm saying! I'm not mad with my sorrow, though that's what they would all say if they heard me say what I'm going to tell you. Mallory, my boy—my boy's not safe here—in the same house with that wicked, hateful Captain Garrington!"

"Oh, sh—sh, my lady! You mustn't say that!

You mustn't think that!" said Jack earnestly, coming a step nearer to her, fearful lest her wild words should reach some other ear than his. "Heaven knows I've no love for Captain Garrington myself! And it's hard to see him swaggering about the place, where a month ago he wouldn't have dared to set his foot. But, my lady, you shouldn't think such things. You shouldn't let yourself think them!"

"I can't help it, Mallory! I've seen things, and heard things, which have put dreadful thoughts into my head! He's a wicked man, he's busy worming his way into the hearts of the people here. When he came, three days ago, everybody loved my boy, and was sorry for him and me. Now, in this short time, there has come a change. They whisper among themselves; and they say—I know they do—what a pity the Captain's not got the estate, after waiting for it so long!"

"Oh, my lady, don't let yourself think of such things. You'll be miserable if you do!"

"I *am* miserable, Mallory! To-day, just now, I heard him say——" She stopped a moment, breathing quickly, while the colour suddenly left her cheeks—"I heard him say something to the baby—with a look—such a look—so hard, so cold, so cruel! Mallory, if he and my boy stay under the same roof long—Captain Garrington *will* be Lord Shelvin some day—some day very soon!"

The young gamekeeper's face had lost some of its

ruddy colour as he listened. He disliked the Captain cordially himself ; he resented his coming to Drake's Hall, as soon as the breath was out of its late owner's body. But from dislike to suspicion is a long step, one he did not feel justified in taking on the mere word of a fanciful, grief-stricken lady.

So he reasoned with her gently, showing her how well guarded the young viscount was, and how impossible it would be, even if her suspicions had just grounds, for any harm to come to the child who was so tenderly cared for.

But he could not convince her. Even his reminder that there was the strong influence of old Lady Shelvin at work on the side of her grandson failed to give her comfort.

"No, Mallory," she said. "Lady Shelvin is fonder of Captain Garrington than she is of my boy. It was she who brought him here ; she would forgive him anything !"

"Well, then, my lady, there is yourself," said Jack.

A sad, wan little smile flitted across her pretty features.

"And who am I ? What am I, now that my husband has gone ? You know that I am nobody ! That nobody considers me, troubles his head about me ! From being an idol, I have become a cypher ! They all look to Lady Shelvin now ; and they treat me as if I were a child ! But oh ! I have sharper

eyes than they think, and sharper ears ! And I shall listen and I shall watch, day and night."

"Why don't you take the baby away, my lady, if that would put your mind at ease?" suggested Jack gently.

Lady Liliás turned upon him impatiently.

"Take him away ! How can I ? They wouldn't let me ! I am not really mistress here, now. You know that, Mallory." There was a pause, for the gamekeeper could not think of anything more to say to comfort her. Then she tried to compose herself, and faintly smiling, said, "But I'm silly to say these things to you. I wouldn't if I had anyone else to speak to. But I haven't. I have no mother : if I wrote to my father, he would say I was fanciful, and he wouldn't even answer me. I am alone : my baby and I are alone in the world. And the one is not much more helpless than the other."

The tears came to the young man's eyes. To see the beautiful lady whom his late master had worshipped reduced to this forlorn condition was a terrible experience. For Jack Mallory's heart was as soft as his arm was strong.

"My lady," said he, in a husky voice full of deep feeling, "you're not so much alone as you think. There's more hearts feel for you and the young master than you think for. If I was to believe the awful things you're afraid of, you'd find me willing

to go through fire and water to serve you and to save him. Take my word for it, my lady; and there'd be plenty more besides me would do the same!"

His honest eyes, the tones of his voice, the expression of his handsome, kindly face, all confirmed and strengthened the effect of his words.

Under the influence of them, the lady grew calmer, happier. With a strong impulse of trust and gratitude, she held out her hand to her late husband's trusted friend and faithful servant, and looking at him with solemn eyes, she said, in a very low voice :

"I believe you; I trust you, Mallory, as my husband would have done. And if I want your help, I shall send for you, I shall rely on you."

Touched to the quick, Jack Mallory made no answer. But as he held the lady's soft hand for a moment in his own hard, roughened palm, before taking his leave with a respectful salute, he swore to himself that, if his very life should be wanted in the service of the young master and the helpless, forlorn young mother, he would give it without hesitation, without regret.

CHAPTER III

LADY LILIAS PLAYS THE SPY

UNDER pressure of the excitement of that day, the young viscountess, not yet in her full strength, and still suffering from the shock of her husband's death, was completely prostrated.

For four days she kept her room altogether, and lay, with her eyes closed, in bed or on the sofa, only waking up to a little animation when her infant son was brought to her for a short hour in the morning, and again in the afternoon.

She would fain have had him with her constantly ; but Lady Shelvin, who had, since her son's death, assumed the position of an absolute autocrat, had laid down rules which nobody dared to break. She had decreed that Lady Liliass was not strong enough to bear the worry of the infant's presence ; and the nurses, knowing that their situations were held at her good pleasure, dared not disobey her orders.

So Lady Liliass lay all day long, with her poor brain in a fevered state, thinking of her babe, and

wondering what was going on in the household ; what progress Captain Garrington was making in the designs she credited him with ; what amount of indulgence Lady Shelvin was showing him.

On the fourth day of her retirement, Lady Liliast learnt that Captain Garrington had visitors. "Two shabby-looking men, who call themselves gentlemen, but were hardly——" this was the vague but expressive description her maid gave her of the persons who had arrived at the mansion, and who were shut in the library with the Captain.

Lady Liliast sat up on the sofa, with her brain in a whirl.

Who were these mysterious persons ? What was their business ?

She must and she would know.

In a few minutes a means of finding out what she wanted to know came into her head ; and she dismissed her maid, telling her she would like to be left to herself for an hour, and would try to sleep.

No sooner was she alone, however, than she sprang from the sofa, locked the door of her room, and entered, for the first time since her husband's death, his dressing-room, from which a narrow private staircase led down to the library.

It was dark, and it was narrow ; and it was with many fears that she would stumble and be overheard that she ventured down, softly closing the door behind her.

The staircase wound round and round ; and at first she could hear as well as see nothing, as she felt her way, groping blindly down the awkward, steep stone steps.

But presently she caught a murmur of voices, and as she got lower, she began to distinguish, first the voice of Captain Garrington, and then his words.

This was the first speech that she clearly heard—

“In short, they won’t lend me any more money?”

“Not only that, Captain,” answered a strange voice, husky and laboured, “but, now it’s got about that the late Lord Shelvin hasn’t left you anything, your creditors will all be about your ears.”

There was a pause.

Then a third man’s voice, sharp, thin, metallic, said :

“It’s the birth of this child that’s made all the difference, you see, Captain Garrington.”

Then Lady Liliass, listening intently, heard the Captain laugh, with a sound in his merriment which froze her blood :

“And his death, of course, would make all the difference the other way again?”

“Undoubtedly,” said the husky voice.

A pause.

Then the third voice asked :

“But is there any likelihood of that? Is the child ailing, delicate?”

Lady Liliass held her breath for the answer.

It came at once, from Captain Garrington.

“There is more than likelihood; there is almost certainty. The child has been sickly from its birth. There isn’t a year’s life in him, I could swear.”

In the dark, on the other side of the oak door of the secret staircase, Lady Liliass clenched her hands in her agony till the nails pierced her tender flesh.

CHAPTER IV

ESCAPE

WHEN Captain Garrington had given utterance to the words which contained, as Lady Liliass felt, a menace to the life of her child, there was a pause, during which she could hear the beating of her own heart.

At last one of the horrible voices, that of the eldest of the three men, as Lady Liliass could be sure even without seeing any of the speakers, was heard again. First there was a short, hoarse laugh, and then he said :

“ Well, of course, if you are *sure* that he is so delicate, things look different for you, Captain. Don't they, Mr. Snodgrass ? ”

And the third voice, the dry, hard, metallic one, answered :

“ Very different, Mr. Dowells, very different indeed.”

“ On the other hand,” said Mr. Dowells, “ it's only a chance, not a certainty. The child *may* live, after all ? ”

It was Captain Garrington who laughed this time, drily :

"He *may* live, of course. But—I don't think it likely !"

"Oh, you don't think it likely ? Then, Mr. Snode, what do *you* think ?"

And the hard, metallic voice replied :

"I don't think it likely."

And then a low murmur of cynical laughter reached the mother's ears.

Her first impulse was to burst open the door and confront them all ; to upbraid them, defy them, overwhelm them with bitter reproaches, drive them from the house with passionate scorn.

She began to feel for the handle of the door. But even as she did so, as her wet and shaking fingers groped in the darkness for some way of egress, her highly-wrought feelings overcame her, and she sank, cold and half fainting, on the bottom stair.

For a length of time she could not measure—it was probably a few moments only, though it seemed to her to be hours—she heard the three voices still talking together on the other side of the door ; but she could no longer distinguish the words they uttered clearly enough to make sense of them. It was all a hideous, jarring noise, more dreadful than any coherent words.

And then, suddenly, as it seemed to her, the noise

died away into silence. Then she rose, staggering and stumbling, and groped her way up the stone stairs, sometimes on her feet, sometimes on her knees, to the apartments above.

When she came into the daylight which still lingered in the dressing-room, she felt for the first moment as if she had just awoke from a hideous dream. The next moment, however, there came upon her a great shuddering horror, the terrible knowledge that it was no vision of sleep which hung over her like a pall, but a real, appalling danger.

"My baby," whispered she. And her own voice struck her with a sense of strangeness. "My poor baby! My little one! I must save him, save him."

And then she stood upright, and leaning for a few minutes against the broad window-ledge, stared out with wide-open blue eyes at the smooth lawns, with their overhanging trees and bright flower-beds; at the well-kept terraces, descending the slope of the hill by easy stages, picturesque with yews and clumps of feathery pampas grass; at the green meadows beyond, at hill and dale, wood and stream, all within the boundaries of that estate, the possession of which was fraught with such deadly peril to her infant son.

"If he'd been the son of that gardener," said Lady Liliass to herself, "or of one of the labourers in the village, nobody would have called him

delicate ; he would have lived ; he would have grown up strong and sound. His mother would have had him in her arms all day, by her side all night ; and he would have been safe, and she would have been happy. While I, poor, wretched, helpless creature that I am, am shut up here as if I were in prison ; and my boy's life is not safe for an hour ! ”

But she did not mean to sit down with folded hands under the peril which hung over her child. Already she was running over in her mind various plans by which she might hope to take him out of reach of danger.

She had rejected at once the idea of applying to Lady Shelvin.

Most certainly her mother-in-law would not believe her story ; and if she were to confront Captain Garrington with his accuser, Lady Liliass knew that he would deny the whole thing with the most brazen effrontery. She felt also so great a terror of this man, such a piteous sense of her own helplessness in dealing with him, that she knew she could not trust herself to accuse him face to face. Lady Liliass was a sensitive, tender, clinging little creature, strong only in her affections ; she doubted her own ability to cope with this man in the open ; she felt the need of some ally to champion her cause.

And she thought of two persons : the family

lawyer, Mr. Durley, dry, curt, parchment-bound, who was in the house at the time, having been sent for by Lady Shelvin on some business in connection with the late Viscount's will. Lord Shelvin had had the greatest respect for this gentleman, as Lady Liliás knew. She would speak to him; she would tell him her story.

As soon as she had made up her mind to this step, Lady Liliás sprang up from the sofa in her own room upon which for a few seconds she had been resting, and ran to the door. She wanted to carry out her plan while her courage was fresh.

But her first visit was to the nursery. She must have her baby at all hazards; she would put her foot down; she would insist, once for all, that he should remain in the room with her. Day and night he should have at least what poor protection his mother's weak arms, but watchful eyes, could give him.

With her teeth set fast she skimmed along the corridors and passages till she reached the baby's nurseries.

But at the very outset she was met with disappointment. There was only a little nurse-girl in charge, who jumped up hastily from her seat in much alarm when her mistress dashed in and stared around her with wild eyes.

"Where's my baby? Where are the nurses?" asked Lady Liliás, in a sharp, querulous tone, as

different as possible from her usual sweet, soft voice.

"They've taken him down to Lady Shelvin, my lady," said the girl, in a frightened voice.

For answer Lady Liliás laughed harshly.

"Oh yes, he can be seen at all times of the day, by every one but his mother!" cried she in a high-pitched voice, almost like that of a child.

And then she left the room, while the little nurse-girl stood with her mouth open, thinking her ladyship must have gone mad.

Down the staircase with flying, yet furtive, feet Lady Liliás ran. Mr. Durley was in the study, a small, shabby room, which the late Lord Shelvin had used more than any other. It brought the tears with a rush to her eyes when she knocked at the door, as she used to do in the old days when her husband was alive.

"Come in, little one!" had always been his answer.

And then she used to creep in quite quietly, and sit on a big, square, shabby old high footstool in the window until he was ready to talk to her.

Now it was the lawyer's sharp, hard voice that called out—

"Come in!"

And it was with a sudden sense of her own feebleness, and inability even to state her case properly, that the young widow glided into the room.

Mr. Durley looked surprised to see her. He rose at once from the chair, her husband's chair, in which he had been sitting, bending over a pile of papers on the broad writing-table. And he stood, stiffly, in an attitude of cold, respectful attention, to hear what she had to say.

But his chilling look and manner, together with the remembrance of the reception she used to get in that very room, had such an effect upon the sensitive young creature that for a few moments she could only sit silently in the chair he stiffly placed for her, trying to compose herself, to collect her thoughts.

"Your ladyship, I am all attention. You have something to say to me?" said Mr. Durley at last.

She raised her head quickly, while the blood rushed to her cheeks, and her brain seemed ready to burst. Springing to her feet, she said, in a hoarse whisper, as she leaned against the writing-table for support to her trembling frame—

"I have something to tell you that you—that you won't believe. I can hardly believe it myself. Mr. Durley, Captain Garrington—" she paused, and looked round her fearfully, with great, shining blue eyes, "he has friends here to-day! And—and I have heard them talking, talking together—about my boy! They say he's delicate, that he won't live! But it isn't true. He is strong, he is well; if he dies," and her voice suddenly sank to a heartbroken

whisper, "it will be because—because they want him out of the way!"

"Lady Lillas!" said Mr. Durley, frowning in amazement.

"Ah!" cried she excitedly, "I knew you'd look like that—that you'd speak like that! You don't believe me! But I tell you I heard them with my own ears. I heard them laugh, too, and chuckle over their talk, and say it would be all right for him when the child was dead!"

It was no wonder that the lawyer looked incredulous. In Lady Lillas' sparkling eyes there glowed a fire which looked like madness; in every restless movement she betrayed a mind distraught.

Mr. Durley was as courteous as possible.

"Where and when did you hear this, Lady Lillas?" he asked, trying not to offend by the dryness of his manner.

She hesitated, and he flashed a scrutinising glance at her. It looked indeed as if she was trying to piece together the half-remembered fragments of a dream.

"I was listening—in the private staircase to the library," she said at last.

She saw in a moment that this had prejudiced her case. The very fact that she had concealed herself to listen betrayed, to the astute mind of the lawyer, that she had expected to hear something of the sort; and imagination, he thought, had done the rest.

"Dear me!" said he, to fill up the time. And he

threw another glance at her, and paused again. Lady Liliás beat the palms of her little hands together, and bit her lip.

“You don’t believe me !” she said passionately.

He held up his hand deprecatingly.

“Of course I believe you, Lady Liliás,” said he, blandly. “But I do think, at the same time, that what you heard will bear a—a—less disturbing interpretation than the one you put upon it. You did not see the speakers, I understand ?”

“No, but I heard them—heard them perfectly !”

“Ah ! well, then, just think how different those same speeches might have sounded if you had seen the faces of the speakers, if you had been able to judge, as you could not possibly do, of the manner and look with which they heard them and answered them ! No, don’t be impatient with me. I am pointing these things out for your comfort and peace of mind. Remember, if those speeches had really borne the interpretation you put upon them, they would not have been so openly made.”

“They were not openly made. They spoke low——”

“So low that there were many words you did not catch, words which would have altered the sense of what you did hear,” said Mr. Durley, soothingly. “No, no, my dear Lady Liliás ; you rest a little before discussing this again. When you have had the night to think about it, we will talk this over

again. At present you are excited, naturally enough, and everything seems terrible and confused to you. Allow me——”

She had risen quietly, looking at him steadily all the time, and turned, with no other answer than a submissive bend of the head, to the door.

Her brain was in a whirl. There was only one thought standing out distinctly from the confusion in her mind : she must escape with her baby ; she must take him away from this horrible house, where, now that his father was dead, there was no arm to shield him, no eye to watch over him, no power strong enough to guard her child.

As for the nurses, they might be bought, she thought ; at least their vigilance might be overcome by a man so astute, so unscrupulous as she felt the Captain to be.

She stood for a moment, in the obscurity of the dark corner of the hall outside the study door, dazed and heavy, when the lawyer, with a formal bow, had shut himself in.

And in that moment she heard the sound of an opening door, and the voice of Captain Garrington, careless, genial, apparently as light-hearted as that of a boy.

He was coming out of the dining-room, on the other side of the hall, with the two men whose voices she had already heard. The broad staircase was between her and them, and she was in the

gloom of a dark corner, while they were in the strong light which came through the staircase window.

She crept up to the side of the stairs, watching them with keen eyes.

The man with the husky voice was short and stout, with a red, fat face, on which grew straggling, thin black whiskers just touched with grey. He had a half-bald, shiny head, and small, sly, twinkling black eyes ; a broad, short nose, and loose red lips. His black clothes were shabby ; his tall hat was shiny ; his manner, his very tread was obsequious, cringing, repulsive in the extreme. His age might have been anything between forty-five and fifty-five. This, she knew, was Dowells.

His companion, partner, whatever he was, gained by contrast with Dowells. He was very tall, very thin, much younger than the other, and much better dressed. His speech, too, showed that he was a man of considerably more refinement and better education than Dowells. But his pale, greyish skin, his thin, colourless lips, which were like a slit in his face, his hard light eyes, his mousy hair—all combined to make upon Lady Liliaš an impression even worse than that made by his companion.

If there was something of the tiger about Dowells, there was more of the snake in Snode.

Over the watching face of Lady Liliās there passed a flickering, wan smile. These were the friends, advisers, of Lady Shelvip's favourite ! Then

it was well for herself, and well for her baby son, that she had found them out so early !

They crossed the hall, conversing idly, and returned to the library.

As soon as the door shut them in, Lady Liliás sprang from her hiding-place, and flew up the stairs. The great oak clock, with its carved brass face glittering in the October sunshine, struck five as she flitted past. The daylight would soon be fading ; she must make haste, make haste.

Her baby would be back in his nursery in a few moments. So she waited until she heard the door of the Long Gallery open, and looking over the stairs, with a fast-beating heart, she saw the head-nurse, with her precious burden, and Emily behind her, coming slowly towards the hall.

Lady Liliás put her hand against her heart, and drew back quickly. She must control all outward sign of emotion before she had to meet these women. So she hurried back to her own apartments, dismissed her maid, whom she found waiting for her with a cup of tea, and, after waiting just long enough to allow the nurses to ascend the stairs, she left her room with leisurely steps, and went to the nursery.

Her heart leapt up at her first sight of her baby, lying in the arms of his nurse. Delicate ! No, he was not that ! Sickly ? Ailing ? It was the basest of calumnies !

Emily, the second nurse, had just brought the feeding-bottle to Mrs. Waters, and the child was showing its delight with the odd little coos and chuckles of infancy.

Lady Liliás came near, her face calm and composed.

"Let me give him his tea, nurse," said she. "I should love to!"

"Oh, my lady, will you? Won't he tire your arm?"

"Not a bit." She seated herself on the nursery sofa, and held out her arms. Nurse Waters laid the baby in her lap. "And now go and have your tea downstairs with the others. It will make a nice change for you. And I'll take care of him till you come back."

Emily was delighted, but the head-nurse looked astonished at the suggestion. Tea in the servants' hall was a suggestion which rather offended her dignity. However, as Lady Liliás insisted, quite stubbornly, she gave way, and retreated, with a face full of misgivings as to what her ladyship would do without any one to help her manage the baby.

"I'll keep Millie here," said Lady Liliás, glancing at the little maid. "She can get me anything I want."

The two nurses went away, and they were no sooner downstairs than Lady Liliás proceeded to get rid of the third nurse by sending her into the garden to bring her some flowers.

"You need not hurry back," said she. "I can ring the bell if I want anything."

Millie was pleased at the errand, and ran away at once. The baby, having by this time finished his bottle, was lying back, contented and happy, in his mother's arms. Quite truly had she said that there was no ground for anxiety on account of his health; he was a fine, strong child, with pretty soft dark hair showing under the embroidered flannel which was round his head. The flabby, indefinite look which nearly always prevents very young babies from being really pretty except in the eyes of their mothers was disappearing; his features were becoming defined, his eyes blue and clear, while his skin was now soft and as fair as wax.

For one long minute the young mother sat gazing into the little innocent face of her babe; then she rose quickly, and going to the high wardrobe where his clothes were kept, she took out his pelisse, and wrapped him in it. Then she found his hood, and put it on, much more cleverly than the nurses would have supposed that she could; then his long lace veil, yellow with age, which had been his grandmother's.

One moment she allowed herself to admire him, to arrange the handsome folds of his cloak, which was of ribbed white silk, richly embroidered and edged with white fox fur. Then she threw round him a large and soft white woollen shawl, and,

opening the door as noiselessly as she could, fled with her precious burden to her own room.

Luckily he was good. She laid him down upon the bed, which, with its spread of pale pink silk covered with white lace, formed a perfect background to his baby beauty. Then she tore her finy bonnet, with its sweeping veil, out of the wardrobe, put it on, wrapped herself in her long black cloak of heavy silk almost hidden with crape, and, gathering her baby up in her arms, escaped from the room and down the staircase like a hare.

Luckily, as she thought, there was no one about. She had no time to stop and listen. With swift feet she glided down, her steps making no sound on the thick carpet, a most pathetic figure in her long, floating black garments, with her unconscious baby at her breast.

She crossed the hall at the same pace, and then, with her hand upon the front door, she suddenly paused, with a strange, almost overpowering sense of the importance of the step she was taking.

Was she taking him into unknown perils greater than those she knew? Was she, weak, helpless creature that she was, even capable of judging what was for the best? .

Dim doubts floated through her mind and darkened her blue eyes, as she stood leaning against the massive oak door which had swung on its heavy hinges for three hundred years. The yellow sun-

light shone on her as she gave a last wild look at the trophies on the walls, at the dark oak panelling, at the frowning portraits.

Was she taking her little son away from his home, from his heritage, for ever ?

Even as this dark thought clouded her mind a sound reached her ears which dismissed her last doubt, hastened her steps. It was Captain Garrington's laugh. Its genial lightheartedness now made her shudder, and it had scarcely reached her ears when, her last scruple vanishing under its influence, she drew back the heavy lock, passed out into the open air, and drew the door close behind her.

She could not shut it without noise. But there was no wind, and the door was heavy. She trusted to her good fortune not to be discovered too soon.

As she fled away from the mansion, hiding herself at once from view by plunging into a labyrinth of tall yews and stiff hollies, her heart grew lighter and her step more firm.

Stooping for an instant over her child, she pressed her lips to the warm baby face, and, while the tears rushed to her eyes, murmured in a soft whisper—

“Saved ! I've saved him—saved my darling boy !”

CHAPTER V

A COQUETTE'S KINDNESS

LADY LILIAS had made up her mind in what direction she would go. Her one true and trusted friend was Jack Mallory, the head-keeper ; and her poor distracted mind held this one thought, as she fled along the paths and through the copse in the direction of his cottage, that he would help her, he would tell her what to do.

The yellow light was fading behind the soft green hills, when, after a walk which seemed long to the fragile lady, unused to the burden in her arms, she emerged from the woodland path which led to the gamekeeper's dwelling.

A most attractive home it was, this old thatched cottage in the wooded lane, with the late roses climbing to the roof, and the feathery clematis still clinging about its lattice porch. Lady Liliass felt her heart leap up. If only Jack Mallory and his sister would take her baby in for a night or two, until she had had an opportunity of communicating

with her own relations concerning his safe keeping, why then she could go back to Drake's Hall with a light heart, confident that under that humble roof her child would be in safer keeping than in his own home.

It was a wild plan, a mad, childish way of escaping from the difficulty she was in. But she had not dared to go along the high-road to the station, where she would have been seen and followed, and ignominiously brought back before she had reached the train. Nobody would think, she argued, of searching for her baby here !

She lifted the latch of the little green gate and ran up to the door.

It was opened by Jack's sister, Hannah, upon whose pretty, but hard face there was a smile of supercilious astonishment at the sight of her visitor.

During the past four days, while Lady Lilius had been confined to her room, a very brisk flirtation had been carried on between Hannah and Captain Garrington, and the girl had been entirely won over to the Captain's way of thinking, that it was a thousand pities he had not come into the property, instead of the unconscious and undeserving baby.

As for Lady Lilius, Hannah was of opinion that she was a poor creature ; and her manner was rather pert as she answered the lady's question whether Jack was at home.

"No, my lady," said she. "He isn't at home

yet, but of course you can wait if you like, if you want to see him."

"I want to ask him, Hannah, whether he will take care of my baby for me—whether he will let you take care of it for a day or two."

"Take care of the baby, my lady!" cried the girl in amazement, and with a strong inclination to laugh which she hardly concealed; "why, what a funny notion! Aren't they taking proper care of him up at the house?"

Lady Liliass had come into the big kitchen into which the door of the cottage opened, and had sunk exhausted upon a chair. She recognised at once the want of sympathy in the girl's tone, and she hesitated to confide in her.

"When will Mallory be back?" she asked, in a tone so full of unexpected dignity that Hannah's own tone became at once more respectful.

"I can't say for certain, my lady. He may be home for his tea in a few minutes, or he mayn't be back till much later. But I know he'll tell you, my lady, that the baby would be much better at home than here. I know nothing about young children; I've never had the care of them. You couldn't have come to anybody who could do less for a baby than I can!"

As she watched her, Lady Liliass felt a strange fear creeping over her. No, even if Jack should be ready to give her darling a shelter under his roof,

this girl was not the sort of guardian who could be trusted with him, even for a night. She rose, pressing her boy more closely to her breast, and asked, in a strangely subdued and humble voice—

“Can you tell me, then, of any one who does know all about the care of children, some one who loves them, some one who—who would help me?”

Hannah stared at her with cold curiosity.

“Why do you want him to go away from his own home at all, my lady?” she asked. “There’s nobody near here who could take as good care of him as all your nurses take!”

“He’s not safe at home!” said Lady Liliás in a whisper.

“Not safe! Why who in the world would do him any harm?”

But the words had hardly passed Hannah’s lips when a ray of light pierced into her mind; and she drew herself up at once, as if she herself had been accused.

“I’m sure, my lady, there’s no one at the Hall who would do him any harm, whatever harm the child might do to them!” said she indignantly.

Lady Liliás made no answer, but she moved towards the door. A doubt crossed Hannah’s mind as to what her brother would say when he heard the lady’s version of the reception she had met under his roof. She ran to the door, and changed her tone to one of deep respect.

"I'm sure, my lady, I'd help you willingly if I could, whatever I might think about its being wise of you to bring such a young child away from its home. But I really don't know of anybody that takes care of children in these parts. There's Bristol, now : I have heard of a woman there——"

"Bristol ! Where ? What's her name ? Where does she live ?" asked Lady Liliās quickly.

There was a moment's pause, and then Hannah said quickly—

"The name is Sweech—Mrs. Sweech. And she lives at Riverside Row, Bristol. But, of course, my lady, I don't know much about her, and——"

"Bristol ! How can I get there ?" asked Lady Liliās, interrupting her abruptly.

"Oh, well, my lady, if you must go," said Hannah, half giggling, half reluctant, "there's Wilson's cart at the bottom of the lane, waiting there for him. He always starts back at six, and if you didn't want to go by the train you could get in that. It's covered, and there's never anybody goes by it Thursdays——"

"Wilson's cart !" echoed Lady Liliās, already at the door. "And the name's Mrs. Sweech ; and she lives at Riverside Row. Thank you, Hannah." She had got to the porch, when she turned, blushing. "And—and 'please don't say anything to any one. Don't tell any one—except, of course, your brother—that I've been to see you at all."

"Very well, my lady," answered Hannah with alacrity.

And she stood at the door watching the poor little lady as she went hurrying down the lane, her black garments sweeping along the damp yellow leaves and clinging, all wet and heavy, to her thin, high-heeled shoes, stumbling, staggering, tired as she was, but still hugging close to her breast, with all the strength of her weary arms, her darling, her innocent baby son.

And as soon as Lady Lilius had turned the corner at the bottom of the lane, the treacherous Hannah put on her hat and went at all speed up to Drake's Hall.

There, blushing and giggling, and refusing to say why she had come, she demanded speech with the Captain.

Although he had been by no means remiss in his attentions to the gamekeeper's pretty sister, Captain Garrington was a little surprised at her audacity, when he was told that Miss Mallory wished to see him. He went out into the hall, however, to meet her.

"Well, Miss Mallory," said he rather coldly, "and what has procured me this pleasure?"

"Well, sir, replied Hannah demurely, "I thought you might as well know that Lady Lilius has taken her baby off to Bristol, and is going to leave it with a woman that's a baby-farmer!"

"What !"

"Ah, sir, you may start. But it's true for all that. Just ask the servants where my lady is, and you'll find she's missing. And it's all along of her ridiculous jealousy of you, sir, that she thinks and that she dares to say that the baby's not safe in the same house with you !" ended the girl at a rapid rate.

Captain Garrington's face grew green. He drew a long breath, and then stood considering this piece of intelligence in all its bearings, without a word to the girl. But at this very moment he became conscious of a stir in the house, of a rushing to and fro, a whispering and excitement, of a shutting of doors and opening of windows that proved something to be amiss.

He ran upstairs, and in five minutes he knew that the news brought him by the girl was true, that Lady Liliás and her baby had disappeared.

To affect the deepest despair and anxiety, alike to Lady Shelvin and to the household, was his first care ; to consult with his two wretched agents and performers of dirty work, Dowells and Snode, who had not yet taken their departure, was his next move. His third action was to start, with these two estimable persons, for Bristol.

To affect to consider Lady Liliás as mad was, he saw, the best attitude for him to take. And the hopes which the adventure inspired in him were

freely expressed by his companions as they waited for the dog-cart to be brought round.

"This night's work will settle the chances of that baby, Captain," said Dowells, with an ugly chuckle. "A delicate child—taken out late in the day—and exposed to the night air. It'll take no baby-farmer to do the work. It's a thousand chances to one it don't reach Bristol alive!"

"I wonder what put the lady up to this move?" said Snode musingly.

"The Captain's lucky star!" answered Dowells readily, as they all went out into the hall at the announcement that the dog-cart was ready.

But there was one person who had yet to learn the news, the person whom the poor distracted lady had trusted to help her in her trouble.

Jack Mallory approached his cottage, whistling softly to himself, and looking the picture of health and happiness, as he strode down the lane with his gun under his arm and his game-bag slung over his shoulder, when he met his sister hurrying back from the Hall.

She stopped short, and the colour left her face. She had hoped to avoid his questions by reaching home before him; now, however, there was nothing for it but to tell the truth, before he could learn it elsewhere. So, stammering and stuttering, she related that Lady Liliast had called at the cottage, and had asked her to take charge of the baby.

"And you refused?" said Jack sternly.

"Now, Jack, be reasonable! How could you and I take care of a young baby? And look what we should have got by it! The Captain would never have forgiven us for helping Lady Liliass in this absurd freak of being afraid of him. And nor would Lady Shelvin, who's mistress up at the Hall now. And you would have had to go!"

"What did she do?" asked Jack with trembling lip. "Did she go back?"

"N-n-no."

"Where did she go, then?"

"To—to Bristol."

Jack frowned. He meant to have the whole truth, and his sister knew it.

"Y-yes."

"You sent her there?"

"Well, don't be angry, Jack. I didn't exactly send her, she insisted on going."

"Where to? To what part of Bristol?"

"Well, she asked for the name of a woman who took care of children, and I told her of—of the only one I knew of, a Mrs. Sweech."

"Sweech—Sweech? Who is she? Who told you of her?"

"Oh, I don't exactly know. But she lives at Riverside——"

"Riverside! Well, I'm off after her. How did she go?"

“By Wilson’s cart, I suppose.”

“Ah ! I can borrow a nag at the bottom. Don’t wait supper for me.”

He was angry, uneasy, alarmed. Without another word he left the cottage, which he had only entered for a moment to lay down his gun and his game-bag, and went down the hill in a few rapid strides.

Poor little lady ! He knew what the hideous fear was which had taken her away, with her baby, from her beautiful home.

CHAPTER VI

A HEART OF GOLD

A MEAN, squalid street in Bristol, down by the river, the shining waters of which, laden with barges and smaller boats, could be seen through peeps of narrow alley and dark passage.

A street picturesque and quaint in its outlines, with gabled, overhanging houses, ancient painted beams, and old windows with tiny latticed panes, it looked its best in the dusk of the gathering evening, with the mist from the river veiling its grimy houses, and the gleam of the recently-lighted lamps shining faintly on the window-panes.

In this mean street one house stood out by a certain air of smartness and cleanliness, by the shining brass knob on the door, by the clean white muslin curtains, the row of bright geraniums in the lower windows. On the door was a brass plate bearing this name : " Mrs. Sweetch."

It was a corner house, facing the street on one side, and a narrow passage which ran to the river on the other.

On the opposite side of the passage was a warehouse, ruinous and shabby, which was flanked, on the street side, by a broken shed, which was heaped up with straw and old iron, planks, broken bottles, old packing-cases, and all sorts of lumber. There was a door to the shed, but this had broken off its hinges, and nobody seemed to think it worth the trouble of repairing; so that the shed had become a favourite *rendezvous* and refuge for the outcasts of the neighbourhood.

Towards this spot, just after the lamps had been lighted, on that memorable October evening, a wretched woman, unkempt, untidy, with misery in every feature, was making her way, followed by a crowd of rough boys, who were jibing and jeering at her, and addressing her familiarly as "Crazy Poll."

Staggering and stumbling, but without uttering a word, she went on her way, not heeding the noisy boys, until she reached the shelter of the shed, where she crawled into a corner among the odds and ends of rope and wood and old iron, and laying her head on a packing-case, closed her eyes as if worn out.

Just as one of the young ragamuffins picked up a stone to throw at the recumbent figure, a lad as ragged as the rest, but taller and older, sprang at him and jerked him away from the shed.

"What are you a-interfering for, Tippetts?" asked

another boy. "We're only having a game with **Crazy Poll**!"

"Well, chuck it, I tell yer!" retorted Tippets, shortly. "She's a good soul as ever was, and she's given me 'arf her own doss-money many a time. Chuck it, I tell yer, or I'll shut the lot of yer into the river afore yer can cry 'Jack Robinson'!"

They attempted to retort, but their hearts waxed faint before the determined voice and attitude of the Cockney; and in a few minutes they had all disappeared, leaving the valiant Tippets master of the situation.

"'Ere, Poll," said he kindly, calling to her from the door of the shed, "don't you be afraid of them young sparks. They won't come near yer no more. Cheer up, I say; I'm in luck's way to-night. I'm off to get some fish and taters, and you shall 'ave supper with me, Polly!"

"Supper! I don't want any supper!" answered the woman in a voice which, despite the fact that it was husky and tired, was strangely musical, and even refined. "I'm thirsty, that's all. I'm dying for a drink, Tippets."

But Tippets shook his head solemnly.

"No, no, you don't want no more drinks to-night," said he kindly. "It ain't no good for yer, Poll. It makes yer bad in the mornin', does the drink!"

"Oh, never mind the morning!" cried the woman

It makes me forget.

"Forget! Well, there's some things yer want to forget, ain't there?"

"No!" said the woman, wearily. "I want to forget everything, Tippets."

"Rubbish!" cried Tippets, springing to his feet, and counting the coppers in his hands. "I'll soon show yer there's something in the world worth rememberin'. Wait till yer tastes my taters!"

And with a cheery nod the lad, wearing his ragged clothes with the light-hearted air of a young prince, darted down the street towards the fried fish shop.

The woman, who had raised her head a little to speak to him, laid it down wearily on the packing-case again.

The narrow street, which was out of the line of traffic, was very quiet, and almost deserted. So quiet that, when a figure in deep black came slowly along under the old houses, making its way with hesitating steps, and stopping from time to time, the attention of Poll was attracted, and she turned where she lay, and looked out through the cracks in the old boards which formed the walls of the shed.

And as she looked she gaped, and opened her eyes wide in astonishment.

For the new-comer was a lady, young, beautiful,

dressed in the deep black of a widow ; and she bore in her arms that burden which never fails to bring out, as if by a magic touch, all the feeling and all the tenderness in the heart of a true woman.

And Mary Gold, "Crazy Poll," as the boys called her, was, in spite of misery and drink and degradation, a true woman after all.

The lady had stopped at the door of the clean, well-kept house opposite, and, after reading the name, "Mrs. Sweech," on the plate on the door, she put up her hand to ring the bell.

The next instant Mary Gold had staggered out from her hiding-place, and laid her thin hand on the lady's arm.

CHAPTER VII

GOOD MRS. SWEECH

LADY LILIAS started on feeling the light touch of Mary Gold's hand on her arm. Turning quickly, with a face full of alarm, she uttered a little cry of horror and disgust on seeing the thin, haggard face of a strange woman beside her.

Poor little lady ! She had not knowledge or experience of the world enough to recognise under the unkempt, uncared-for, unprepossessing exterior of "Crazy Poll," the true heart of the real woman shining through the reddened, blurred eyes. So she shrank back, and looked at her with an expression which betrayed the feelings in her heart.

Mary perceived this, but she was too much in earnest to be easily repulsed. Removing her fingers at once from the lady's arm, but remaining close at her side, she whispered, in a voice trembling with earnest entreaty—

"Don't go there ; don't take your poor baby

there! The children who are taken in at that house never come out alive."

Lady Liliás drew a long breath of horror, but she was evidently incredulous.

At that moment the door opened, and a neat, clean, motherly-looking woman, rather stout, of about forty to fifty years of age, appeared smiling in the little passage of the house.

She saw at once what had happened, and waving Mary away, with a warning but not harsh manner, she said, in a kind, pleasant voice, which matched her amiable and kindly aspect—

"Now, now, Polly, what are you doing, annoying the lady? It's not right of you, you know. Go away."

Lady Liliás, whose innocent heart went out to this woman as readily as it had recoiled from the shabby, untidy Polly, gave a long sigh of relief.

"Oh," she said, "are you Mrs. Sweech?"

And as she spoke she turned her back on Mary Gold, who, with a sullen and defiant air, folded her arms, drew back a few steps, and watched and listened.

"Yes, ma'am, I'm Mrs. Sweech," said the neat-looking woman readily, "and what may you be wanting with me?"

At that moment Lady Liliás, who had kept her precious burden concealed under the folds of her long cloak, allowed the white silk pelisse of her

baby to appear, and to catch the sharp eyes of Mrs. Sweech. Instantly that good woman fell into a paroxysm of tender delight.

"Why," cried she, holding up her hands, and even venturing to raise one side of the lady's black cloak so that she might peep underneath, "you've never got a baby there! A dear, sweet baby! Oh, ma'am, you must let me see it! I dote on babies, I do, I dote upon 'em all! A boy! A sweet little boy!" she went on, as she caught sight of the rosettes on the white hat, which are supposed to be mysteriously indicative of the superior sex. "And if I've got a choice in the matter, I says, give me boys!"

As she went on with her rhapsody, Mary Gold, in the background, uttered from time to time a short, discordant, ironical laugh, which grated upon the ear of both her hearers.

Mrs. Sweech turned towards her in dignified remonstrance.

"Mary Gold," said she, shaking her forefinger at the bedraggled, defiant woman, "I'm ashamed of you. Just becous you're not capable of good feelin's, feelin's of affection and fondness, to poor little 'elpless things as can't look after themselves, you must make game of them as Providence 'as given feelin' 'earts to! Be off with you! Be off, I say! And don't pollute the hair for them that 'as more feelin' than yourself!"

Mary Gold laughed again.

"Oh, I won't," said she, scoffingly. "I won't presume to breathe the same air with such a tender-hearted, kindly soul! Ha, ha, ha!"

And she turned and went slowly back to the shed, which she entered noiselessly. There, taking up a position close to the broken wooden wall nearest to Mrs. Sweech and the lady, she put her eyes to one of the cracks, and watched and listened with great attention.

"What a dreadful woman!" whispered Lady Liliass faintly. "Who is she?"

"Well, ma'am," answered Mrs. Sweech, with a long-suffering and indulgent air, "she's a poor creature, and I don't know that there's no pertikler 'arm in her, barring that she's fond of the drink. And we know, ma'am, don't we, what a awful thing is the drink, specially when it's a woman takes to it. It makes 'em fiends-like, don't it, ma'am?" Lady Liliass shuddered. "No, I've always been a teetotaler myself, and it's to that I put down the respect in which I'm 'eld."

As she spoke, Mrs. Sweech ran her eyes, as if carelessly, over the dress of the lady, noted the fact that the lace and fur on the infant's clothes were of exceptional quality and costliness, and became proportionately civil and smiling, as a result of her survey.

"I have heard of you," said Lady Liliass in a low,

hurried voice, when the woman gave her at last an opportunity of speaking, "and I've heard that you take care of children——"

"Bless them ! Why, ma'am, if so be as I could afford it, I'd open an 'ome for the little dears, and keep them right free of charge, that I would, jest out of love ! That's what I feel about all infants, ma'am, and when it comes to a blessed little dear like little master there—Oh, ma'am, jest let me look at him ! Bless him ! I can't resist the longing I 'ave for to 'old him in my arms !"

As she spoke she lifted the baby, with a practised hand, out of the tired arms of its mother, and, dandling it in her own, clucked at it and cooed to it, and then held it, with every appearance of overflowing tenderness, against her breast.

Into Lady Liliash's gentle, soft blue eyes the tears came at the sight.

"Oh," she cried, in a weary, sad voice full of emotion, "you are used to children, and you do love them, I can see. You will be good to my baby—you will take care of him ?"

"That I will, ma'am," cried Mrs. Sweech, as she soothed the baby, who had begun to cry, to intimate that it was time for his supper, "that I will ! And you'd like to come inside my little 'ome, and see where he'll sleep, won't you, ma'am ?"

"Oh, yes, I should like to, please !"

Mrs. Sweech, still holding the baby in her arms, led the way into her house, and opening a door to the left, entered a small and extremely neat "parlour," where a small fire was burning in the grate, and where a child's swing cot, newly done up with spotted muslin hangings of snowy whiteness, stood in a conspicuous position in the corner between the fireplace and the wall.

"What ! have you another child here ?" asked Lady Liliás quickly.

"No, no, ma'am. I'm without a darling jest now, and that's why the sight of yours 'as cheered me up so ! No, ma'am ; the baby that was last in that cot—for I never will take no more than one at a time, ma'am, so as I may give myself up to it properly—the last baby I 'ad 'as jest been fetched by his mother, fetched away in a kerridge and pair, ma'am, jest sich a one as maybe you 'ave waiting yourself, ma'am, at the corner of the street !"

And Mrs. Sweech, as she spoke, watched slyly for the effect of this suggestion.

Lady Liliás had been taking in all the details of the room with a keen eye, and had been delighted with the spotless cleanliness and neatness of every corner. Surely, she thought to herself in her innocence, this clean, motherly, respectable-looking woman, who was used to children and fond of them, was just the safest and best guardian she could leave her baby with, for the few days which

must elapse before she could find him a permanent home.

If she could only get back safely to Drake's Hall, she said to herself, without the whereabouts of her child being discovered, she would be able to keep her mouth obstinately shut, with that dogged determination so often to be found in weak and apparently yielding creatures, while she wrote to her aunts, the Ladies Tabitha and Gwendolin Claristone, who would, she felt sure, help her when they knew how deep, how real her fear for her darling son was.

She turned to Mrs. Sweech, with agitation in her manner.

"It is not for long," she said, "that I want you to take care of him. Perhaps it will only be for two days : most certainly it will not be for so much as a week. And then I will come and fetch him—myself."

"And if I should have to write to you, ma'am, about the dear boy, what name and what address?" asked Mrs. Sweech, with a keen look.

"Oh, that will not matter," said Lady Liliastyle hastily. "In fact, I would rather not give any address. And the name—oh, the name is Brown—Mrs. Brown."

"It is not usual," began Mrs. Sweech, with an almost imperceptible change of tone, "for no address to be given. In fact, in the face of the responsibility, I——"

"You will not have to bear the responsibility

long," answered the lady, with a poor little smile. "I shall send some one to see him every day. And he is to have everything he wants ; you are to spare no expense for him——"

"Well, ma'am," began Mrs. Sweech, more coldly still.

Lady Liliass took out a purse from her pocket, and opening it, put half a dozen sovereigns into the woman's hand.

Mrs. Sweech's manner became enthusiastic again at once, and Lady Liliass looked at her anxiously.

"I hope," said she, "that it isn't only for the money——"

"Bless your heart, no, ma'am !" retorted Mrs. Sweech quickly. "It is only for fear my poor means wouldn't allow me to get him all he wants, and all the nice things he's been used to, poor little dear ! Though it's only for a day or two, as you say, ma'am, still one wouldn't like him to miss anything of his little comforts ; and I shall see to it, down to hivery brushes, ma'am, you may be sure."

But the mother did not hear her. She had taken her baby once more in her arms, and was holding him to her breast, while, with dim eyes fixed upon *his baby features, she was muttering over him a prayer that God would keep him safe and sound while he was away from her.*

The next moment, with a smothered sob, she pressed her lips passionately against the soft pink

flesh of the tiny face, and putting him quickly into the arms of Mrs. Sweech, with a broken entreaty to her to take good care, great care, of her darling, she fled out of the room, and out of the house, into the narrow, dark street.

CHAPTER VIII

AN UGLY TRANSFORMATION

THE moment the lady had left the room, Mrs. Sweech slapped the baby down, not into the nice clean cot, but upon the little hard, horsehair-covered sofa, and running to the window, flattened her nose against the tiny panes, to watch the lady go past.

And at the same time she slipped her hand into her pocket in search of her spectacles, chuckling to herself the while.

"Mrs. Brown, eh?" said she to herself, in a tone of fine scorn. "No Mrs. you, my fine lady, I'll bet! If you was a respectable married woman you wouldn't be coming my way with your brat, I lay! It's the last of you I shall ever see, no doubt. But there may be some more money to be got out of you. Let's 'ave a look!"

And, putting on her glasses, Mrs. Sweech pulled down the blind, lit the gas, and gazed fondly at the

six bright sovereigns which the lady had given her.

"She don't want for coin, whoever she is!" mused she, as she took up one of the sovereigns and bit it fondly. "Wonder if it 'ud be any good goin' after her, and finding out who she is?" As she thought this, Mrs. Sweech made a movement towards the door, but was arrested on her way by the sight of the baby's pelisse.

Regardless of the cries of the hungry child, she went over to the sofa, took up an end of the cloak in her fingers, and passed her fingers admiringly over its surface.

"My! What lovely silk!" said she, half aloud, while the baby, from feebly crying, began to scream lustily. "And what fur! And yet to 'ave to get rid of him like this! It's wery mysterious!"

She turned the cloak inside out, with great interest, while the child cried on unheeded. Finally she took the garment off, and held it up to the light. Then she threw it out upon the table, and examined the rest of the clothes with ever-increasing wonder and delight.

"What lace! Real, worth six bob a yard, if it's worth a penny!" murmured she ecstatically, as she fingered the long petticoats and the soft cambric robe. "Fancy wastin' all that lovely stuff on a brat! Well, we'll put it to some good use now, any'ow! The pop-shops ain't shut yet; I'll get

somethin' on these 'ere afore they gets mucked up any more. I've got plenty clo'se good enough for 'im, without sp'iling of these !"

So saying, she snatched up the baby, administered a sharp slap of impatient ill-temper as he doubled up his little legs and clenched his tiny fists, thus hindering her in her work of plunder, stripped off his hat and veil, his robe and his long, lace-trimmed petticoat.

"Drat the child !" cried she angrily, when she had finished her task, and the baby lay, purple with screaming, with its eyes closed, and its little fists still clenched, on her inhospitable lap. "Any one 'ud think I was a-murderin' of it ! I'll teach you to scream and shriek, my fine feller, and deafen folks and make the neighbours think as you're being ill-treated ! I'll jest lay you down where you can cry till you're tired, and then maybe you'll go to sleep, and get up a appetite for your supper !"

She got up, handling the clothes more tenderly than she did the baby, laid the robe and the rest of the things carefully on the table beside the cloak, and stood for a moment admiring them, with her head on one side and a smile on her face.

Meanwhile the poor child, little used to such rough treatment, and already feeling piteously the difference in his circumstances, hung head downwards over her shoulder, crying with all the force of his lungs, and kicking one little bare pink foot

through the long flannel which was now his outermost garment.

Recalled to remembrance of her unlucky little prisoner, Mrs. Sweech, the smile fading from her face, gave him an angry shake.

“‘Ere, ‘old your noise, you little varmint !” cried she, as she pulled him roughly down by the leg, and, snatching a dirty old shawl out of a box under the sofa, proceeded to wrap it round him in such a manner as almost to stifle his cries. “I must get you a penn’orth of milk, I suppose, or you’ll be ‘owlin’ ‘arf the night ; and while I’m about it I can provide myself with a drop o’ somethin’ warmin’ for myself out o’ the proceeds of your fine tog-gery !”

She chuckled with ferocious jocularly as she carried the child out of the room, down the passage, and through her little kitchen to the scullery beyond. This was an outbuilding, opening to a yard surrounded by warehouses, and with a way through to the river, which, so report said, Mrs. Sweech had often found convenient for the disposal of certain unwanted fragments of humanity which found their way to her well-known “Home.”

Here, in a cradle which was nothing better than an old wine-case, still half-full of straw, she laid Lady Liliass’ child, in the old shawl with which she had replaced his own handsome clothes.

“Now, my deary,” she said playfully, as she shut

him into the scullery and returned to the parlour, "you may cry your heart out, and no one will 'ear you ! Oh !" She opened her mouth once or twice, like a newly-caught fish thirsting for its native element, "I am dyin' for a drink, that I am ! It's been precious low water all the week, but I can *make up* for it now, thanks to that fool of a lady and her blessed kid."

Mrs. Sweech said these words softly to herself while she seized her neat bonnet and her black cloth jacket and put them on. She had contracted the habit, common to people who live much alone or much with young children, of talking to herself. *She went out into the passage, arranging the bows of her bonnet-strings as she went ; for in her own person she was always orderly and careful of her appearance.* When she reached the front door she discovered that the latch-key, which she usually carried about with her, had been left in the pocket of another dress. But, as she was in too great a hurry to go back and look for it upstairs, in her eagerness to obtain the refreshment she wanted and to find out how much she could get for the child's clothes, she contented herself with drawing the door to without shutting it.

"I sha'n't be above a minute," said she to herself, "and nobody won't be likely to get in while I'm just round the corner, not even if they was to see the door was open—which they won't do !"

So she went down the street with marvellous rapidity for a person of her portly figure, leaving the baby in its cold, dark corner, alone in the house.

She had made a mistake in her reckoning, however. Some one did see that the front door was left open; some one who debated with herself whether she should take advantage of the fact.

This was Mary Gold, who had never left the corner in the shed, whence she had seen the entrance of Mrs. Sweech, the lady and the baby, into the house opposite, and the exit of the lady by herself a little later.

She now got up from her corner and came to the door of the shed. Dark as the street was, she could see that Mrs. Sweech carried a bundle, and that the bundle did not contain the child. Mary knew, in common with most of the neighbours, that Mrs. Sweech, "nurse" as she called herself, combined this profession with the practice of baby-farming; although the woman was so artful and so careful that the fact had never been brought home to her.

She had done her best to warn the beautiful young mother of the child, and she had failed. But Mary's interest in them both had not been quenched by the snub she had received; and now she began to puzzle her head as to the scene she had witnessed, and as to the fate of the child.

This handsome, stately lady, refined of speech, graceful of movement, exquisitely dressed, was not

the sort of client Mrs. Sweech usually had. This was no case of a poor young servant, deserted by her lover, anxious to find either a home for her unwanted child, or an easy way of ridding herself of her burden of shame.

Mary knew that the young mother was a lady ; and the more she considered the circumstances, the stranger did they appear to her.

What could such a lady want with such a woman as Mrs. Sweech ? Had misfortune turned her brain ? And was this visit a proof of the cloud which hung over her grief-disordered intellect ?

And the baby ? The poor baby ! Mary's face softened as she thought of it. The child had been used to all the luxury, all the tenderness of a happy, beautiful home, that was certain. How would he fare under the roof of the nurse with the ugly reputation, the reputed baby-farmer ?

At this point in her reflections, however, Mary Gold, alone as she was, uttered a harsh, scornful laugh. Why should she trouble herself about the baby ? What business was it of hers if its mother was a fool, or a madwoman ?

But though she said this to herself, Mary was not satisfied. Under the slatternly, ill-cared-for exterior of the woman, there was that warm human spot which softens, sometimes glorifies the whole nature ; and the more she thought about the scene she had witnessed the more disturbed she grew.

Then she argued with herself angrily ; she was a donkey, an idiot to suppose that Mrs. Sweech would not treat such a child well. When there was money in the case, as there certainly must be here, even such a woman could doubtless be kind, careful enough. The baby was the goose ; she would not surely kill it and stop the supply of golden eggs !

And yet——

Why had she already left the child alone ? Was this a good beginning, that she could neglect it so soon ? Mary, as these ideas flitted through her mind, drew nearer and nearer to Mrs. Sweech's front door. At last she touched it and pushed it ajar, and listened for some sound, some cry.

But she heard nothing. So presently, still anxious, still curious, she ventured a few steps along the passage, and then, when she found herself opposite to the parlour door, she peeped in. There was the nice clean cot standing in the corner ; perhaps the little one was sleeping quietly within it. The gas had been turned down by the careful tenant, but there was enough light from the little fire for Mary to find her way easily across the floor, and to see into the cot. With a quickly beating, tender heart, she drew back the curtain and peeped in.

The cot was empty.

Then an intuition of something gravely wrong seized Mary, and made her look round the room carefully for some sign of the baby's presence in the

house. Neither the lady nor Mrs. Sweech had carried the child out of the house, she felt sure ; at least, if Mrs. Sweech had carried it out in that mysterious bundle, the child was not alive.

Mary, excited, alarmed, reckless of the consequences to herself if she were caught trespassing upon these questionable premises, felt that she could not go out until she had found out what had become of the baby. So she left the parlour hastily, and went down the passage into the kitchen. There was no fire there, and no light ; no sound either, at first.

But when she had lingered at the door for a few seconds, peering into the darkness, and listening for the slightest noise, a faint moan, coming from an outer room, startled and shocked her.

Making her way across the kitchen floor so hastily that she hurt herself by contact with the sharp corner of a table, she found the latch of a door by feeling the wall with her hands, and stumbled down a couple of steps into the cold, roughly tiled scullery outside.

Here there was a little more light, there being a small skylight, filled with ground glass, in the roof. And as she stepped down, Mary heard another weak little moan.

It came from a rough box in the corner, and the next moment Mary was down on her knees beside it, feeling about her with trembling fingers.

A cry burst from her lips when she touched the old shawl, which seemed to be crammed into the straw of the box as into a heap of rubbish.

"My God!" cried she, in a voice which made her exclamation almost a prayer, "it's the baby!"

To snatch the child out of its miserable hiding-place, to uncover its head, to find that, though half-suffocated, it was still alive, was the work of a few seconds. Then she stood up, with the child clasped against her breast, her heart wrung, her head on fire.

What should she do? Where should she take it?

Mrs. Sweech would be back in a few minutes, probably. If she found her there she would lay claim to the child, would turn Mary herself out of the house, and would be free to continue her brutal treatment of the little one. So said Mary to herself, knowing well that for her to attempt to interfere would be useless. If she were to go to the police and tell her story, who would believe her? Mrs. Sweech was cunning: she herself was not a person of much credit: there was little doubt who would get the best of the affair.

And in the meantime the child wanted care, wanted love, wanted the warmth of her breast to restore the healthy colour to its cold little limbs; wanted the tenderness which welled up in her heart to guard it and shelter it.

A strange, strong yearning filled the forlorn, miserable woman as she hugged the little creature

to her heart, and covered its chilled limbs with her own arms, and whispered soft syllables of love and tenderness into its unconscious ear.

Feelings to which she had long been a stranger—of human kinship, of kindliness, of sympathy—began to fill her poor breast as she hung over the babe ; and at last out of the numbness of her long-closed heart there rose a strange belief, which thrilled her through and through.

God had sent this baby into her arms, the poor girl thought—had sent this poor mite of neglected humanity straight down into the bosom of her who wanted comfort. And even as she stood there, on the cold stones of the scullery, staring down with dim eyes in the faint light at the baby in her arms, it seemed to her that the little face assumed a new aspect, that the infant mouth smiled at her, the baby eyes gazed at her, with a meaning and an intelligence beyond those of infancy.

And she thought that an angel had been sent down to her in the guise of the abandoned child.

CHAPTER IX

THE LITTLE MESSENGER

GIVE it up? Give up the baby, *her* baby, to the care of Mrs. Sweech? Never! Mary felt that she would die first.

Discarding the dirty, evil-smelling old shawl which Mrs. Sweech, who was so careful about her own dress, had thought good enough for the infant left in her charge, Mary wrapped the child up in her own poor jacket, and cuddled him closely to her. He was fretful, restless still. Hungry, thought Mary. And she remembered her friend Tippets, and resolved to seek him out and to get him to help her in this difficulty. He had promised to give her a supper; he should provide one for the baby instead.

She had got as far as the kitchen on her way out, when Mary's attention was arrested by a soft knock at the outer door of the house. She stopped short, in alarm, but, remembering that it could not be Mrs. Sweech herself, she decided to put a bold front

on the matter, and to answer the door and take her chance of meeting any one she knew outside.

As she came down the passage she heard the voices of two men, conversing together in low tones, and she was seized by a strong suspicion that they might have come about the baby in her arms.

She opened the door in the most matter-of-fact manner she could assume, holding the baby, wrapped in her own old jacket, close to her breast.

"Does Mrs. Sweech live here?" asked one of the men, a short, fat, shabbily-dressed man, who filled her with repugnance even before he spoke.

"Yes," said Mary shortly.

Dowells, for it was he, looked up quickly at Snode, who was behind him.

Snode looked, not at Dowells, but at the baby in Mary's arms.

"Are you Mrs. Sweech?" asked Snode, in a more conciliatory and less peremptory tone than his partner had used.

But Mary was just as short in her manner to him as she had been to his companion. She liked the look neither of the one nor the other; and she grew more and more certain that they had come after the baby, and that he was better where he was than with them.

"No," said she, sullenly.

"Is she in?" asked Snode politely.

"No."

"Well, young woman, you might be civil," said Dowells, snorting with outraged dignity.

"You can wait for her if you like," said Mary, without heeding his remonstrance; and she came out of the passage into the street. "She won't be long, I dare say."

She was walking away at a rapid pace. Snode, with a warning frown and a wink at Dowells, pointed to the baby. Instantly Dowells seized the hint, ran after Mary, and placing himself in her way, assumed the nearest approach he could manage to a coaxing and wheedling tone.

"Let me look at your baby," said he, as he put his hand on the jacket which was round the child, and tried to tear it down, so that he might see the face. "Whose is it, eh? Yours?"

"It's not yours, at any rate," retorted Mary fiercely, assuming a rather rougher speech than was natural to her, as she twisted herself and the child out of his reach.

Not to be shaken off, Dowells was in her way again in a moment.

"Come, come," said he, with a persuasiveness so different from his earlier manner that Mary saw through it at once, and was more than ever convinced that he had some sinister motive in his anxiety about the baby, "you needn't be so

touchy. I only want to look at the child. I'm a father myself, and awfully interested in the youngsters."

"Well, there are plenty about for you to interest yourself in, without taking notice of mine," retorted Mary, in the same sulky tone as before.

"Oh, it *is* yours then?" persisted he.

Mary, without giving him any answer, slipped past him, and hurried off in the direction of one of the little narrow alleys that ran towards the river-side. With an expressive nod to his companion, and an intimation that he had better remain behind, Snode went after her, and, with an apologetic air, said—

"I really must apologise for my friend. He isn't much used to ladies' society, and his manners are not what they ought to be in dealing with them. I don't know what to say for him, really. I'm awfully sorry, awfully, if he offended you."

All the time Snode, putting on a slight affectation of a drawing-room drawl, appeared to be anxious only to soothe her wounded feelings, and was careful not to give a single glance in the direction of the child. Mary replied to his advances by a sulky nod.

"All right," said she. "You'd better go and look after him, hadn't you, and see that he doesn't get himself into more hot water?"

But Snode appeared to care nothing for his com-

panion, and to be still only intent on making his peace with Mary. His manner was so beautifully indifferent, his half-laughing apologies were so profuse, that Mary began to feel amused rather than offended, and to be off her guard with him.

"Oh," said he, "really I don't care whether he gets into hot water or not. You let him off too easily, much too easily. He really deserves a lesson, and I hope he'll get one. My concern is with you. How can I apologise to you for him, and show you how much hurt I am at his boorishness? I suppose you wouldn't let me—I hardly like to suggest——" He affected a shy reluctance, stammered, hesitated, and at last got out the words, "you wouldn't let me ask you to have a glass of wine? There's a place at the corner, not a very nice place to ask a lady to, but still——"

Instinctively she had slackened her steps, her eyes aglow at the suggestion. Her mouth was dry and parched. The artful Snode could see the longing growing stronger in her bleared eyes, from which the beautiful light of womanly tenderness had by this time faded quite away.

"Well," said she, after a moment's struggle with herself, "I suppose it will be your turn to feel hurt if I say no, so I'll come. But only one glass, mind, only just one."

Even as she spoke, there was a pitiful wrestling going on in the woman's heart between the right

and the wrong. Her tone was sullen, defiant, her voice hoarse and eager. Snode, behind her back, made a gesture of triumph to Dowells.

"Certainly," said he, "that shall be as you please."

"This way, then," said she, with a ghastly caricature of a smile, feverish, wistful, yet shamefaced and guilty. "Don't go in there; they serve you better at a place I can take you to."

She was an *habituée*, a *connoisseur*, evidently. Strode followed her as she came quickly back, past the house of Mrs. Sweech. And as he passed Dowells, who was lingering outside that good woman's door, he whispered, in a dry, hard voice—

"That's the child—in her arms—I'm sure of it. She'll be speechless in half an hour. Then—why, then the baby might tumble off her lap, I should think—drunken women are not too careful. And then, of course, the Captain will be Sir Hugh! And—that will be worth a bit to us, I think, Mr. Dowells."

"Right you are, Mr. Snode," whispered Dowells, in ecstasy.

The woman had turned, and was impatiently waiting. A few steps away, with its warm yellow light streaming invitingly out across the narrow street, the miserable little public-house looked bright and cheerful, clean and well-kept, compared with the dilapidated houses on either side

of it, with their broken windows and their general air of dirt and neglect.

As she stood there, in the middle of the narrow street, still torn by the sullen conflict within, Mary heard a little whimpering cry from the child at her breast. Turning quickly to the light, she raised the corner of the old jacket in which she had wrapped him, and looked down at the baby. It moved its little head, it tried to put out its small fist. And the woman felt once more that wholesome tug at her heart-strings, that touch which was to be her salvation.

Covering the child again quickly, she turned her back upon the flaring lights and all the temptations they implied. She ran back, and said hurriedly, in a loud, defiant voice, to Snode, who placed himself eagerly in her path—

“I’ve changed my mind. I won’t go in with you. I’m not—I’m not thirsty.” Then, as she avoided the hand with which he would have forcibly detained her, and hurried towards the shed, she added below her breath, “God forgive me for telling a lie!”

Snode was after her in a moment, ready with persuasion, with entreaty. But the woman was beyond the reach of both. Knowing her own weakness, recognising vaguely but surely the baby’s danger, Mary turned into the first of the narrow alleys of which there were so many in the neigh-

bourhood, and seeing a back door open, slipped inside and waited.

Dowells and Snode, in hot pursuit, both turned into the alley a moment after. But there was no sign to tell them where she had disappeared; and Dowells, less cautious than Snode, spoke to his companion in a voice loud enough for Mary to catch the sense of his words—

“Mr. Snode, you are right. It is the child, I believe. And if it gets back alive we are done for. Do you think the woman knows whose it is?”

“S—h!” said the other voice.

But, as they went down the alley, Dowells persisted in talking, in a thick, deep whisper which was audible in the confined space of the passage.

“We must find her, follow her, that’s certain!”

Mary waited until she judged they had got out of the alley and to the riverside, and then she came out by the door, and went rapidly in the opposite direction, soothing the whimpering baby, and hugging it with redoubled tenderness now that she knew that nothing but the shelter of her arms stood between the babe and death itself. But the mystery which hung over the child bewildered, appalled her. In the meantime, however, her own course of action was clear enough. She must evade, outwit these two men, and must trust to time and chance to find out the child’s true friends.

As she dared not risk going straight to the shed, which was her rendezvous with Tim, there was nothing for it but to make a circuit through bye streets and reach it from the other side. But she had scarcely gone a dozen steps along the first street, when Dowells and Snode, coming down another alley from the riverside, saw her and gave chase again.

She turned and again sought the shelter of the alley she had just left. A bright thought struck her as she ran. Reaching the open space by the riverside, she tore in two the old jacket in which she had wrapped the baby, and laid the child, wrapped in one half of it, on the top of some sacks of corn which she caught sight of on the ground floor of a warehouse on her right. Then, snatching up the first thing that came to hand, which proved to be a loose brick which had been used for keeping the warehouse door open, she wrapped it in the second half of the jacket, and ran back along the quay-side, past the entrance of the alley, just as Dowells and Snode were on the point of emerging from it.

"There she is !" whispered Dowells.

Mary never looked round. She ran on along the river's edge, knowing very well that the two men would keep her in sight, until she reached a spot where there was no barge or boat moored alongside.

Then, raising her arms with a low cry, she threw

her burden into the water, and ran on at a rapid pace.

The trick succeeded. Her pursuers uttered an exclamation, looked at each other, and stopped.

"She's done it this time!" said Dowells, with a grin.

"Couldn't have been better!" said Snode.

"Shall we go after her, and give her up to the police?" asked Dowells.

Snode shook his head.

"I think we'd better not come forward any further in the matter, Mr. Dowells," said he. "The child's made away with, and without any idea of our connection with it. I think we'd better get back to the Captain, and tell our story."

They walked off together quickly, while Mary Gold, who had found ready means of concealment among the bales of merchandise on the quay, came cautiously out and ran back swiftly to the place where she had left her precious charge.

In the meantime, however, the poor child, abandoned for the second time, had begun to whimper and then to cry lustily. And the sound of his distress came to the ears of the very person who, if the poor mite had only known it, was one of his best friends. This was honest Jack Mallory, who had reached the riverside in his quest of Mrs. Sweech's house, and who, in the course of his search, had been attracted by the child's cries.

Little, however, did the young gamekeeper guess, when he found the poor half-dressed baby wrapped in half of an old jacket among the sacks in the warehouse, that he was looking at his old master's child. He took it for some poor neglected little waif of the slums, and was bending over it with a man's uncertainty as to the proper way to handle such a frail piece of humanity, when Mary Gold, coming noiselessly round the doorway, uttered an exclamation of alarm at the sight of him.

By this time Jack had summoned enough courage to raise the crying child in his arms; and Mary put out her hands quickly to take it from him.

"Is it your child?" asked Jack, reproachfully. "A nice place to leave a poor little thing like that in!"

"I couldn't help it," said Mary sullenly. "I hadn't any other place to leave it in. You're one of the salt of the earth, I expect, who don't make allowances for people who're less well off than yourself!"

There was a gas-lamp outside, and as Mary took the baby in her arms, and bent over him, and whispered to him, Jack watched her narrowly, and saw such an expression in her poor thin face as made him look again, and, looking, wonder. Perhaps the goodness of his own heart enabled him to detect the germ of good in another soul. At any

rate it was in a much softer, gentler voice that he next spoke.

"Your child's hardly warm enough, I should think, for a night like this. And—and—it sounds to me as if he cried because he was hungry!"

Mary drew a long breath; it was a sob.

"I've got nothing else to put on him," said she hoarsely. "And nothing to give him to eat—yet—— But—but—I'll get something, if—if I have to beg for it."

She had turned her back on him, and was hurrying away, hoping to meet Tippetts with the promised supper. Jack ran after her, and thrust his leather purse into her hand.

"Here, here," said he, in a hurried whisper, "take this. And get something warm to put on him, and on yourself too."

Mary Gold's first instinct, miserable as she was, told her to refuse. The next moment, however, she took the purse, shamefacedly, with bowed head.

"I daren't say no," said she quickly, "because of the child. And—and I thank God—you came in my way to-night. It's all part of the good thing that's—that's happened to me!"

Jack was silent, awestruck indeed. For in the woman's poor, sad eyes, as she raised them a moment to his face, he saw a look which made him bow his head in reverence.

"Goodbye," said he.

“Goodbye,” said she, as she turned, with her head erect once more, and disappeared in the dimness of the evening mist, among the narrow alleys, like a spirit in a dream.

CHAPTER X

THE BABY'S FRIENDS

A STRANGE fancy crossed Jack Mallory's mind as Mary Gold, with the baby in her arms, disappeared in the gloom. If only, he thought, his master's child could have found such a woman as this to take care of him, he would have been safe alike from the vagaries of his poor, weak, fanciful young mother, and from the possible machinations of Captain Garrington.

Although Jack had scouted the idea of unfair play on the Captain's part, when Lady Liliass had made him the object of her strange confidence, the game-keeper had dwelt upon the matter since then, had watched every visitor to the house who came on the Captain's business. And, having in particular taken a strong dislike to those two worthy men, Messrs. Dowells and Snodgrass, who seemed to be Captain Garrington's trusted agents and friends, Jack had begun himself to feel anxious about the baby's safety, and to wish that old Lady Shelvin were not quite so much infatuated about her dissolute nephew.

It never once occurred to his mind that the baby he had seen in the arms of the untidy, haggard woman could be the little Lord Shelvin. It must be confessed that he had had little experience of infants, and that to his eyes one baby looked very like another. He had seen his master's son only in gorgeous robes of soft cambric and dainty lace, and it was such a picture of the young master that he carried about in his mind's eye.

How could he conceive that the poor, forlorn little mite, with no covering but its underclothes and part of a ragged old cloth jacket, could be the child of whom he was in search ?

How could he guess through what adventures, what vicissitudes the infant viscount had already passed ?

He did not know the house of Mrs. Sweech, neither did he know anything of the woman or her reputation. All he felt was that this low neighbourhood was not the place to which his old master's son ought to have been brought ; and he was incensed with his sister for having sent Lady Liliass to such a quarter.

When, however, he found the little corner-house, with its trim, inviting appearance, he felt reassured. It was not until he had knocked at the door, and Mrs. Sweech had presented herself in answer to his summons, that his hopes sank, and suspicion rose in his mind.

For the woman had lost the neat, trim, smiling appearance which had gained the confidence of Lady Liliass, and now looked heated, uneasy, and distressed.

Moreover, she smelt strongly of gin.

The fact was that, on her return from her visit to the pawnbroker's with the baby's clothes, and then to the public-house for the refreshment she had promised herself, Mrs. Sweech had gone into the scullery and discovered that the child had disappeared.

Now she was not a person to trouble her head about the infant itself, but for the fear that some one had found her out, and that she might be called to account for her behaviour in the matter.

What if the mother herself had returned, in her short absence, had discovered the child flung down into the boxful of straw, and had taken it away? There might be circumstances in the case which would prevent the lady from making complaint to the police; but she would certainly want her money back, and would institute inconvenient inquiries about the child's clothes.

In her distress and anxiety, Mrs. Sweech, uncertain whether to leave her house and look about, or to stay where she was and brave the matter out, had applied herself with more zeal than discretion to the small flat bottle which she had had filled for her evening's solace; and, on hearing Jack Mallory's

knock, she had come to the door, not very steadily, and with a sullen determination to show fight rather than give up her six bright sovereigns.

On seeing that the new-comer was a stranger, and that he was not accompanied by the lady in the black cloak, she took courage a little, and peeping round the door, asked, as quietly as she could manage to do, what he wanted.

"I want to know," began Jack, keeping his eyes fixed steadily upon the woman's face, and noting every detail of her appearance and of her disturbed and anxious manner, "whether a lady has called at your house this evening? A lady with a child?"

Mrs. Sweech had hard work to maintain an appearance of composure.

"No," she said, rather sharply, "no. There ain't been no lady 'ere, and there ain't been no child!"

And she tried to shut the door in his face. This Jack, with his suspicions stronger than ever, prevented by putting his foot in the door.

"Are you sure of that?" he asked sternly.

"Now then," said Mrs. Sweech, betraying, in a sudden change of manner, that she could bully as well as she could cringe, "who are you that you presume to come arsting me, questions as if you was a inquisition? Be off with you, and if you want to find out things what don't concern you, why, you must try some other way than by coming riding the 'igh 'orse 'ere, I can tell you!"

"Come, come," said Jack, whose heart grew sick at the thought that this might indeed be the woman whom his master's poor young wife, in her innocence, had trusted, "why do you get so angry? There is no shame, surely, in having a visit from a lady, a lady who thinks well enough of you to leave her child in your keeping?"

"There ain't been no lady and child, I tell you," persisted Mrs. Sweech, doggedly. "Why shouldn't I say there 'ad, if so be as they 'ad been 'ere? I'm a woman of my word, I **am**, and everybody 'ere knows and respects me. And I ain't used for to be arsted questions in the tone you'd like to use with me, young man."

She had now relapsed into an attitude of dignity; and Jack, who felt more and more sure that the baby had been left with her, and more and more anxious to get it away from such doubtful quarters, bethought him of a better way of approaching her.

"The fact is," said he, "I'm a little upset this evening, and I am rather rougher in my manner than I ought to be in addressing a lady."

Mrs. Sweech, though still on her guard, was evidently mollified by this speech. She nodded in a *dignified* manner, though she still kept behind the door.

"If you're upset," said she majestically, "it's no reason why you should go about a-upsetting of other people!"

"No," said Jack. "But if you'd come upon the errand that's brought me, you'd be upset too. The baby I'm looking for," he went on impressively, "is a baby that'll be a very grand gentleman when he grows up ; and I'm to give twenty pounds to the person who'll carry him safe back to his home."

As he had shrewdly suspected, cupidity unloosed the woman's tongue. Indeed the thought that she had lost twenty pounds by her own folly stung her so bitterly that she lost her discretion, as she would hardly have done if she had been in a less excited state.

"Twenty pounds !" cried she, coming right round the door in her excitement, "twenty pounds ! Then somebody 'ad got wind of it, and they've took the child for to get the money !"

"What ?" cried Jack, aghast. "Do you mean to say you've had the child, and he's been stolen from you ?"

But in a moment Mrs. Sweech saw, by the eagerness of his manner, that she had gone too far. As she had come out, he had retreated, leaving her room to stand in her doorway. Taking advantage of this fact, she withdrew so quickly that he had not time to stop her, and getting quickly behind her door again, slammed it in his face. •

Jack was horrorstruck. He saw that she had indeed lost the child, and that he could do no good by further researches here. He therefore went at

once to the nearest police-station, and gave a description both of Lady Liliass and of the baby, saying that the lady was supposed to have lost her way in the neighbourhood.

In the meantime Mary Gold, with the baby safe in her arms, and Jack Mallory's big leather purse in one hand, had worked her way round to the shed and come in sight of Tippetts, who, crouching over his supper, gave a shout at her approach.

In a moment she had put her finger to her lip, *drawing back* as she did so, with a frightened glance towards the house of Mrs. Sweech.

Tippetts, with his paper parcel in his hand, jumped up from the door of the shed, and followed her down the nearest alley.

"Well," said he, eagerly, "so you've come at last ! I'm blest if I hadn't given yer up ! Where have you been, eh ? And what have yer got there ? And——" This as a sense of some wonderful change in her came over him, while he looked, "And what's come to yer, eh ?"

"Come with me, and I'll tell you," said Mary, in a hoarse, eager whisper, as she beckoned him to follow her back once more to the riverside.

As they went, however, the baby uttered a little cry,* and Tippetts stopped short.

"My gracious !" cried he in dismay, "if it ain't a kid !"

"Sh—sh !" said Mary Gold.

But Tippetts was too much excited and alarmed to be silent.

"You 'aven't bin and gone and took to old Mother Sweech's game, 'ave yer?" cried he in dismay.

Mary Gold laughed with tender happiness, and the lad was more and more struck by the change in her.

"Blest if it ain't the fust time I've ever 'eard yer laugh, Polly," said he. "And if the kid's done that, why, I'll forgive it. 'Though what yer can see in a squalling, squeaking brat is more than I can say!"

"Oh, Tippetts," cried Mary, in a breathless tone, to which her new sensations had brought back some ring of hope, of brightness, "it's a happiness I can't explain. But I—I had one of my own once. And though it was what they call a burden and a disgrace to me, it broke my heart to see it die!"

And her voice sank, and she buried her head in the baby.

"Well," said Tippetts, more gently, "come an' 'ave some supper. You'll feel better when you've tasted——"

She interrupted him quickly.

"Tippetts," said she briskly, wiping her eyes, "I was forgetting. I'm nothing but a maundering old thing! I was forgetting the baby and *his* supper. I want you to go to the dairy, that nice, bright one next door to the chapel, and get me some milk, some of the new milk out of the great china bowl.

But first—and I don't know whether you'd care to do that for me——”

“I'd do anything, anything for yer, and for the kid too !” said Tippets goodnaturedly.

“Well, then, you must go into the glass shop in the little street down there, and buy a baby's feeding bottle. See, I've got the money. And you must have it washed, and then you must get it filled with the milk, and then you must get them to warm it for you. Will you do this, and quickly ?”

“Won't I ? 'Ere's a lark !” cried Tippets.

“And then,” pursued Mary earnestly, laying her hand on his arm, “you musn't say who it's for, and you must bring it, not here, but to the corner where Bender's Lane turns into the Bath Road ; for I'm going to London, Tippets !”

Tippets opened his mouth wide, and then he shut it again, and whistled.

“I'm blest !” said he softly. And then he added, “And the kid too ?”

“Yes.”

“It's all along o' the kid, I s'pose ?” went on Tippets, with his head on one side.

Mary nodded, and signed to him to go away, and to make haste.

Half an hour later, at the turning she had mentioned, Tippets came up to her again, with a chuckling laugh.

“I've got the bottle,” said he. “And lord, how

they did chaff ! But I never let on, not me ! I jest let 'em 'ave their laugh, and I come away, and 'ere I am !”

Mary did not heed him. She had snatched the bottle, and carrying the hungry baby to the stile where she had been waiting, she was soon seated, and giving the poor mite its supper.

“And now how about yourself ?” said Tippetts, as he opened his despised parcel, and proceeded to lay before her his choicest morsel of fried plaice.

She tried to eat to please the goodnatured lad ; but she was too much excited to enjoy the repast. Tippetts, who was suffering from no such drawback, ate his portion with avidity ; but even as he munched, he watched her curiously. When he had finished, he said abruptly—

“And now about this London trip, Polly. Do yer mean it ?”

“I do,” said she firmly. “I can't tell you all about it now, Tippetts, but this poor little innocent has some enemies, who want him put out of the way. And so, as I must take him away from Bristol, there's nothing for it but for me to take him to London. For that's where I come from, and that's where I can get work to do to keep him.”

“Why didn't you never think o' goin' back to London afore, Polly ? There's no place like it !” said Tippetts. “I'm from them parts myself, and I ought to know !”

Mary Gold looked startled.

"Why did I never think of it?" she asked slowly. "Why, because lately—I haven't been thinking of anything except—well, except drink."

And as she uttered the word she bowed her head with new and beautiful shame.

"But yer ain't goin' to think of that no more, are yer, Polly?" asked Tippetts affectionately. "Not now yer've got somethink else for to think about! It seems a rummy sort of thing to take up with, a baby!" he went on, scratching his head, as he looked at the small creature who was absorbing Mary's tenderness, "but I s'pose women is always like that. Such women as you, any way!"

"It's all come upon me so suddenly; it's like a dream," said Mary. "Listen, Tippetts, isn't it like a fairy tale? That I should find this baby, I, of all people, and then that I should hear something said which showed me that he is in danger—I don't understand why, or anything about it. Isn't it strange, and wonderful? It makes me think," she went on, with the tears stealing down her cheeks, "that God has not forgotten me after all, and that there is something for me to do in the world still!"

"Well, well, don't you cry about it, Polly. I'm that glad I can't tell yer that you've found something to make you happy. And look 'ere, if you're goin' to London, blest if I won't go too!"

"You, Tippetts?"

"Yes, me, Tippetts. I dunno quite 'ow I got down in these parts, tramping bit by bit. But I shall be glad to see the old streets again. Talk o' fields! Give me the Mile End Road on a Saturday night! That's life, that is, and scenery! I don't care for the sight o' cows a-eatin' their 'eads off on the grass! I likes to see 'em a-'anging up all of a row in the butchers' shops, with the lights flarin' all round 'em, and the butchers a-callin' out, 'Buy, buy, buy!' That's the sort for me, 'specially when I've picked up a lapful o' toppers' and can 'ave a bit o' meat for my Sunday dinner!"

Mary laughed at this comical description of the delights of London life, but even as she did so she rose, and set off at a brisk pace along the Bath Road.

She had already purchased a big, warm shawl for the baby with part of the money Jack Mallory had given her; and she was now debating with herself whether she should go to London by train, as she had enough money left to do, or whether she should tramp it on foot, and save the precious shillings.

"What are yer goin' to do when you get there?" asked Tippetts.

"I'm goin' to try to get in at one of the theatres again," said Mary. "I used to sing in the chorus once, and perhaps I shall be able to get in again, if I try. Or get in as an extra, and see if I can't work myself back."

Tippets stared at her in astonishment.

"Sing in the chorus at theayters!" cried he.

"Why, Polly, 'owever long ago was that?"

"Three years," said she quietly.

"What? Why, then, you can't be so very old!"

"I'm twenty-two," said Mary very softly, and as if ashamed of the confession.

Tippets opened his eyes wide.

"I always thought you was fifty!" he said simply.

But Mary did not laugh this time. She sighed.

"I've gone through what makes a woman old," said she. "But," and again she looked lovingly down at the now sleeping baby, "I've got youth enough left in me, please Heaven, to work for the treasure that's been sent me to-night."

"Polly," said Tippets after a pause, speaking in a tone which had something of reverence in it, "don't you tramp to London; you go by train. The sooner you get there and get to work the better for you, and the better for the kid. And as for me, I'll get up there my way, and if you'll jest let me know what part you're goin' to, I'll find yer out, and you'll let me come and take care of your youngster, while you're a-dancin' and a-singin', and a-gettin' flowers chucked at yer in the theayter, won't you?"

"Indeed, Tippets, I shall be glad of a friend there," said Mary gratefully.

"Why, you'll get lots o' company at the theayter,

and you won't want me. I sha'n't be grand enough!" said Tippets.

Mary shook her head.

"I was never one of the grand ones," said she. "There are two sorts of girls in the chorus of a theatre, Tippets: the girls you hear, and the girls you see. I was one of the singing ones, and nobody took much notice of me."

"Then how did you come—down in the world?" asked Tippets sympathetically.

"I'd left the theatre, and was working at a shop," said Mary briefly.

Tippets nodded, to intimate that he meant to ask no more questions.

"Come," said he briskly, "we must foot it out, Polly, if you're to catch a train to London to-night."

And she walked on, in the darkness, past the lights of Drake's Hall, with the unconscious babe asleep on her breast.

CHAPTER XI

THE BABY'S ENEMIES

NOW Captain Garrington, although he had left Drake's Hall with his trusty agents, Dowells and Snode, in pursuit of Lady Liliás and her child, had thought it better not to put himself too prominently forward in the search.

For although of course neither he nor his two companion rascals had said so much in words, it was pretty well understood by all three that this opportunity of removing the baby from its cousin's path was too good a one to be missed. It would be so easy to lay the blame of its death on its imprudent mother, if an opening should appear for putting it out of the way.

If they found the child, it would probably be in questionable hands, and a very little management would be necessary to bring about a result which would enable the Captain to pay all his debts, including what he owed to Dowells, who did a little money-lending on his own account, and to make him Lord Shelvin without further delay.

So Captain Garrington, knowing that it was to the interest of his agents to do his very dirty work thoroughly, put up the dog-cart at an hotel on arriving at Bristol, and let Dowells and Snode sally forth in the direction of Riverside without him.

There was one thing, however, which he felt he could do with safety. He could go to the railway station and intercept Lady Liliass if she took it into her head, after seeing the Bristol neighbourhood, not to leave her son there, but to take him with her to Norfolk, where her father lived.

For the Captain felt that the worst thing which could possibly befall him would be for the baby to be taken quite out of his reach. While he could remain under the same roof with it there was always the chance of a lucky "accident"; but if once the child were housed in far-away Norfolk, there would only be the usual chances against its infant life, and his own hope of succeeding to the title and the property would grow faint again.

He went therefore to the railway station and studied the time-table. It was a relief to find that there was no recent train by which Lady Liliass could have gone. He strolled in and out, watching the entrances, in a state of considerable anxiety.

To his intense relief and satisfaction, before very long he caught sight of the conspicuous figure, in the long black cloak and the dignified widow's

bonnet, coming quickly into the booking-office, and without the child.

Captain Garrington rushed towards her with every appearance of the deepest relief.

"Lady Lillas!" cried he, and he managed to make his voice tremble as he spoke, "Thank heaven!"

At the first sound of his voice the lady had stood perfectly still without uttering a sound. But when he proceeded to seize one of her hands, she drew back quickly, with a shudder.

"And the child! My dear little cousin! Where is he?" asked the Captain, with well-simulated emotion.

"He is safe, thank you," said Lady Lillas, coldly, but in a hoarse voice.

But Captain Garrington would not be satisfied with this assurance. Assuming a tone of affectionate, yet respectful solicitude, and keeping close at her side whichever way she moved, he said earnestly—

"My dear Lady Lillas, you cannot expect me to be satisfied with that assurance, without knowing what has become of him! I have to calm Lady Shelvin's fears, remember, as well as my own."

"I can do that," said she, very quietly.

Captain Garrington drew back with an assumption of wounded feeling.

"Indeed, Lady Lillas," said he, "I hope you will be able to."

Then, as she turned away abruptly, he had no choice but to retire.

Indeed, now that he was once satisfied that she had not got the child with her, his interest in the young mother had dwindled very considerably. He was now impatient to meet his agents, Dowells and Snode, and to find out what had befallen them. So he left the station and returned to the hotel, where, in a very short time, those two worthy persons arrived in a cab.

The first look he got from them convinced the Captain that all had gone well.

"I regret to inform you, Captain Garrington," said Dowells solemnly, when he had walked pompously into the private room the Captain had ordered, and had accepted an invitation to help himself to the whisky which stood on the table, "that your infant cousin, young Viscount Shelvin—is no more."

Captain Garrington hardly affected, however, to take a sombre view of the happy occurrence.

"How was it? Tell me all about it," he said shortly.

"The child was left in the care of a woman," said Dowells impressively, "who made short work of it by throwing the infant into the water."

"What?" asked Captain Garrington, incredulously.

"Into the river," repeated Dowells solemnly, "Mr. Snode and I saw her do it."

But this was not enough for the Captain; and when he had heard the whole story, and had learned

that the identity of the drowned baby with his young cousin was founded upon conjecture only, he began to pace up and down the room impatiently, and to express in no uncertain terms his opinion that they had both been "had."

"Look at the way the child was rigged out," said he, turning to them quickly. "Wouldn't any woman have the sense to know there was more to be made out of such a child alive than dead?"

"Not that woman," said Snode with a drawl. "She was altogether a person below the consideration of anything, except 'goes' of gin, and pots of fourpenny."

"Then how do you account for her getting away from you?" asked Captain Garrington shortly. "No, we've not seen the last of this business yet, depend upon it. You must try again."

This time, however, Captain Garrington was too much interested in the search to let his agents go away without him, so he got into a cab with them, and driving to within a short distance of the corner where Mrs. Sweech lived, they all three left the vehicle to wait for them, and went in a body to the house.

By this time Mrs. Sweech had administered to herself so much more consolation from the flat bottle, that she was in a very confused state when she opened the door, and was apparently under the impression that the police had come to make

inquiries. She was very humble, very polite indeed.

"Well, gentlemen," she said, when Captain Garrington had begun by asking if her name was Mrs. Sweech, "and what may you want with me? I'm sure, gentlemen, if there's anythink as you want to know, I shall be very pleased to tell you. Walk in, gentlemen, pray walk in, if you please."

Captain Garrington, followed by his two companions, availed himself of this invitation, and accompanied Mrs. Sweech into her little parlour, where she turned up the gas, and invited them to be seated.

"We won't detain you long, Mrs. Sweech," said the Captain, "for we've only come to ask you whether a lady in black called here this evening, and left a baby with you? I need not add that we know you to be a lady of the highest character, and that, if the baby is in your care, we know that it is in perfectly good and safe hands."

The mention of the lady and the child threw Mrs. Sweech into such a state of emotion, that it was clear to all her visitors that she had had some transaction with Lady Liliás, whatever she might pretend. They all waited politely for her to speak.

Perhaps, slightly clouded as her intellect was, Mrs. Sweech was artful enough to divine that the interest of these three persons in the matter was less tender than that of her last visitor, Jack Mallory.

At any rate, she was much more conciliatory to them than she had been to him.

"Well, gentlemen," she said at last, with dignity, "I will not go for to deny as I 'ave seen sich a lady and sich a child as you describe. But, gentlemen, as I thought from her manner as she were a bit wrong-like in the 'ead, and not in a condition to know quite what she was a-doin' of, I simply wouldn't open the door to her, gentlemen, but I jest shook my 'ead at the winder for her to go away."

"Well, Mrs. Sweech, for your own sake I am sorry that you did so, though I have no doubt your motives were right. For the child's grandmother, who agrees with you in her belief that the unfortunate mother of the child is not quite in her right mind, in consequence of distress of mind, has authorised me to pay a handsome reward to the finder of the child."

Mrs. Sweech groaned and wrung her hands.

"I can't 'elp it! I can't 'elp it!" she moaned. "I don't know where the child is no more than the dead, and I don't know where for to look for it, reward or no reward."

Her sincerity was so earnest, her regret so bitter, that they all looked at each other, and recognised that she was telling the truth.

"Well," said Captain Garrington, as he turned towards the door, "I'm exceedingly sorry, Mrs. Sweech, that we cannot have the pleasure of paying

the reward to you, since you have been so obliging."

He was already in the passage, and Mrs. Sweech was following him, uttering vague suggestions to which nobody listened, when the hard, dry voice of Snode cut her short—

"I am myself of opinion, Captain Garrington, that the unfortunate lady threw the child into the river in a fit of mental aberration. I did see a tall, slim, elegant woman throw what might have been a child into the water at a spot which I can point out; and I am strongly of opinion that it was *the* lady!"

This bold assertion took all his hearers by surprise, and was hailed by two of them as a very clever perversion of the real fact. Mrs. Sweech, too, caught at it eagerly.

"And I've no doubt but what it was 'er as you saw, sir," said she promptly, "for she went that way where the water is, at the end of the lane, and she did look to be in a fearful wild way, that she did."

When they had all got outside the house, and had taken leave of the worthy Mrs. Sweech, Captain Garrington looked inquiringly at Snode.

"You think it was Lady Liliass you saw, eh, Snode?" said he.

"The more I think of it, the more sure I am," said Snode quietly.

"And will you tell Lady Shelvin that, in the

presence of Lady Liliass herself?" said the Captain tentatively.

"In the interests of truth I shall feel bound to do so, Captain Garrington," said Snode, without moving a muscle.

"Oh, all right, if you feel sure that—that another woman will not turn up—*the* other woman who is certainly in the case, and contradict you."

"I must take my chance of that," said Snode in the same tone as before.

"I wonder," went on the Captain musingly, "how Lady Liliass will take it. She will contradict you, Snode."

"But what will her contradiction be worth, considering the evident state of her mind? Nothing, unless the woman whom we found in Mrs. Sweech's house should turn up. That is now the only danger we have to fear."

"But it is a great danger!" said Captain Garrington.

"It would have been, if she had not herself made away with the child."

But upon this subject it was impossible to allay Captain Garrington's fears. There was a mystery about this unknown woman, an inconsistency about the story told by Dowells and Snode concerning her, which made him shrewdly suspect that there would be trouble from that quarter in the future.

CHAPTER XII

A VERY PRETTY PLOT

BY the time Captain Garrington and his two precious agents had bidden goodbye to Mrs. Sweech, Jack Mallory was already within sight of the red walls of Drake's Hall.

He wanted to speak to Lady Shelvin before Lady Liliass should come back, and before Captain Garrington had had time to instil his own views into the old lady's mind.

He found the whole household in a terrible state of confusion and alarm. The first question asked him on his appearance was, "Had he heard of the disappearance of Lady Liliass and the child?" The next, "Had he heard anything of her?"

Having replied to these questions, Jack begged that he might see Lady Shelvin, and was told to wait in the hall.

He had learnt already that Captain Garrington and his agents—solicitors, whatever they were—had started in search of the missing pair.

In a very few moments Jack was summoned to the Long Gallery, where he found the old lady, erect, grim, gaunt, with deeper lines than of old in her withered cheeks, pacing up and down, up and down, leaning on her crutch-handled ebony stick, and looking like some witch of old in her trailing grey satin skirt, her soft folds of cream chiffon and mellow-tinted old lace.

Jack shivered as he watched her. The shimmering of her dress was reflected in the shining dark oak floor, which was uncovered except for a square of oriental carpet or a lion-skin thrown down here and there in the corners and in the embrasures of the deep windows. The pendant points of the elaborately embossed ceiling formed a frame above her ; the caryatides which formed the most prominent part of the carved stone mantelpiece behind her made a cold and stately background to her dignified figure. The tall carved oak chairs and ancient spinning-wheels to right and left of her all helped the illusion that it was some lady of the olden time, some witch-like noblewoman of the dark days of the Middle Ages, who now stopped short at the sight of the young gamekeeper, and turned upon him almost fiercely.

"Well, Mallory," said she, in a voice which was firm indeed, but hoarser, harsher than usual, "what do you wish to say to me?"

The candles in the sconces on the wall flickered

in the draught, and the red flames of the fire shot up and threw their bright gleam on dark oak and faded tapestry.

"My lady," said Jack, in a low, pleading voice, "I found the woman that Lady Liliás left the young master with, and—she has lost the child."

The old lady uttered a short gasp.

"What could one expect? Lady Liliás is mad."

"No, my lady, begging your pardon for making so bold," said Jack firmly. "She's nervous and anxious, as all true mothers are; and she did what she had better not have done in putting the young master with a woman she didn't know. But she was ill-advised, my lady; and sorry am I to have to own it was my own sister gave her the address of this woman, a Mrs. Sweech, of Bristol. I've given information to the police, my lady, and they will look out and find his lordship, I make no doubt, if Lady Liliás doesn't bring him back herself, as I hope."

Lady Shelvin, however, gave a short, hard laugh.

"You do wrong not to doubt, Mallory," she said. "For my part, I feel just as sure that I shall never see my grandson again. Let this be a warning to yourself, Mallory, and when you think of marrying, if you care for what becomes of your children, don't marry a fool!"

She dismissed him with a motion of her stick, which was like the waving of a witch's wand; and

Jack, amazed and shocked by this unexpected outspokenness, and trembling for Lady Liliás, withdrew at once.

It was nearly eleven o'clock before Captain Garrington, with his satellites, arrived at the Hall, and they found the old lady still in the Long Gallery, pacing up and down. Although he did not usually obtrude these individuals upon his aunt's notice, Captain Garrington felt that their testimony, on this occasion, would give the weight of numbers to his own. He therefore brought them both into the Long Gallery with him, and left them standing in the background as he approached her, and, with every appearance of deep sorrow, informed her that they had reason to suppose that her grandson, Greville, Lord Shelvin, was beyond the reach of help.

So thoroughly prepared was she for this announcement, that Lady Shelvin heard it in perfect silence. After the lapse of a few moments she pointed to the bell.

"Ring, Hugh, please," said she.

Again there was silence until a servant appeared, to whom the old lady at once spoke.

"Has Lady Liliás come back?"

"Yes, my lady."

"Request her to come to me."

When the man had retreated, there was silence for another moment. Then Lady Shelvin said—

"We will discuss this matter in Lady Liliass' presence. It is only fair to her."

"Will you not first hear——" began the Captain.

But she cut him short, raising her hand.

"No," said she, shortly.

Dowells and Snode, at the far end of the long apartment, were beginning to feel uneasy. Dowells expressed the feeling by shuffling and scraping on the slippery floor, at imminent risk of slipping and falling.

They had only to wait a few moments, however, before Lady Liliass, now without her bonnet, and in her little widow's cap, deathly pale, but very calm, very quiet, glided into the room and went up to her mother-in-law.

The old lady had taken a seat, and was erect in a high-backed carved chair, where she sat like an ancient queen holding a court of judgment.

Lady Liliass threw a frightened glance, first at Captain Garrington, and then at his two confidants.

"You sent for me, mother?" she said, in a low, tremulous voice.

"Yes. You can hardly have expected that, after such a daring proceeding as your taking my grandson out of the care of his proper guardians, you should be asked no questions. Where did you take him?"

"I have put him in the care of a trustworthy person," said Lady Liliass, in a low voice.

"Mrs. Swerch, of Bristol," said Lady Shelvin quickly.

Lady Lilius started violently. Her mother-in-law went on, in a relentless tone--

"But he is no longer with her."

"What?" faltered Lady Lilius. But the next moment, in a more reassured tone, she asked, "Who says so?"

"My nephew, and those gentlemen," replied Lady Shelvin, waving her hand towards the three men, without looking at any of them.

"Ah!" cried Lady Lilius. "And what do they say?"

Her tone was scornful, though rather uneasy.

"Ask them."

Lady Lilius turned slightly, without raising her eyes from the floor. Urged on by a glance from Captain Garrington, Snode spoke.

"I regret very much to have to speak in the presence of this lady, and to have to state what I saw. I know very well that she was in a state of mental anxiety so great that she was not responsible for her actions at the time, but undoubtedly I saw this lady, whose name I did not then know, but whom I now recognise, carry a child, an infant in long clothes, to the quayside at a low part of Bristol, and throw the child into the river. It is deeply painful to me to have to state this circumstance. My friend and I both ran to the water's edge, calling for assistance,

and endeavouring to save the child. But I regret to say that, by the time we came to the spot, all traces of it had disappeared."

Lady Liliass remained perfectly still while he made this speech. Her attitude was expressive of scornful bewilderment. When he had finished she turned to Lady Shelvin—

"I can hardly understand, mother, how you can listen to this preposterous story!" said she. "You have only to go to the house of this Mrs. Sweech, who is a most respectable woman, to find there my boy, safe and sound."

Lady Shelvin's hand was on the bell.

"You will believe what Mallory, the keeper, says, I suppose?" she said quietly.

Lady Liliass grew, if possible, a shade paler than before.

"Mallory!" said she, in a faltering voice; "yes, I can trust Mallory. But——"

There was silence again while the servant reappeared, and went away with the order to bring the gamekeeper. Jack had not left the house, and he returned to the Long Gallery in a few minutes after this summons. His face was pale and troubled. Already he had guessed that he was called to perform an unpleasant task.

"Mallory," said Lady Shelvin, "tell Lady Liliass the details of your visit to this woman Sweech."

Thus adjured, Jack, feeling that his mouth had

become suddenly dry and parched, looked imploringly at the young lady, who was standing, erect and statue-like, by one of the high carved chairs.

"Yes, Mallory, tell me," said she, in a voice which was piteous, full of tremulous anxiety.

"What am I to tell you, my lady?" asked Jack, in a hoarse voice.

"They say—Lady Shelvin says, you went to Mrs. Sweech's house this evening after I had been there!"

"Yes, my lady," stammered Jack.

"Well, and did you see my baby—my boy?"

There was a pause. For a moment Jack could not speak.

"Did you see him?" she repeated wildly, stamping her foot.

"N—no, my lady."

"You asked about him?"

"Yes, my lady."

"And she wouldn't let you see him? What did she say? What did she say?"

Jack clenched his fists tightly and stared out before him.

"My God! I can't tell her!" he moaned.

But the next moment her hand closed on his arm like a vice, and she was staring into his face with wild, wide-open eyes.

"Speak! you must speak! And you must tell the truth; the truth, if it kills me! Wasn't he there?"

"My lady," gasped Jack, "no. He was gone. But we'll find him, we'll——"

He stopped, cut short in his speech by the terrible change which had taken place in Lady Lilius.

For one moment she remained rigid, staring at him, with fixed pupils, white lips wide apart; the next she fell back, looked vacantly round her, and bursting into a horrible, shrill laugh, that echoed in the vaulted roof, began to dance, singing to herself the while, among the little spindle-legged tables and the high-backed chairs.

An exclamation of horror broke from the lips even of Dowells, as they all watched her, shuddering.

Snode alone retained his self-possession. Sliding up to the side of Captain Garrington, he whispered—

"The game's ours—*your lordship!* Who will doubt that she did it—now?"

CHAPTER XIII

A NEW LIFE

IT was not a transient wave of feeling which passed over the heart of Mary Gold on that memorable October evening when she rescued the neglected, helpless baby from the clutches of Mrs. Sweech.

The better nature of the woman had triumphed once and for all time when she struggled with the temptation held out by Snode. Into her poor, forlorn, saddened heart the little creature, with its tiny arms, its baby smiles, had crept ; and it held fast its place there without wavering, without questioning, opening to her a new life of womanly work, and that truest happiness which is founded on the love of home.

She soon found an opportunity of getting back to the stage again, although at first she had to take the humble position of an "extra lady" at ten shillings a week.

For neglect and exposure had injured her voice ; so that she was unable at once to resume her old

position in the better-paid ranks of the efficient chorus.

She did not doubt, however, that she would be able to resume that position when care and practice had restored her singing powers ; for her voice was naturally a strong one, and she had been thoroughly trained in music.

In the meantime, it cannot be denied that her life was a hard one. But she was one of those women whose whole energies are dependent upon their affections ; and when once her heart was roused from its lethargy, she became at once a changed woman, eager for any opening, watchful of every opportunity, passionately industrious, and untiringly devoted.

She was clever with her fingers, and she easily got work in the wardrobe of the theatre, and among the actresses, which she could take back with her and do in her own little home.

This was a very modest one.

It cut Mary to the heart, at first, to think that she could only give her precious baby such a poor abode as a single furnished room afforded. It was on a top floor too, which, although all the better from a sanitary point of view, as she could get purer air close to the roof than she could have got nearer to the ground, was, she felt, a humiliation for the son of such a grand lady as his mother undoubtedly was.

But the baby did not seem to feel the humiliation very acutely. He was a healthy, happy child ; and having suffered no harm from his strange adventures of that October night, he throve better than before in the care of his new and most devoted guardian.

He learned to know her at once, would put out his hands to her when she came back from the theatre after her night's work or a rehearsal, and never rest till she took him up in her arms, and cuddled him against her breast.

During those hours when she was forced to leave him she never ceased to worry herself about him, wondering whether he had been discovered and carried off by Mrs. Sweech, or whether he had woke up to find himself alone, and had promptly cried himself into a fit. She, however, always took care to leave him in the charge either of her friend Tippetts, who had got precarious work in a stable hard by, where he lived, or of her landlady's daughter, a girl of fourteen, who was almost as devoted an admirer of the baby as Mary Gold herself.

It must not be supposed that Mary, while she thus worked and worried herself for the child, remained satisfied with her ignorance of his name and history. She and Tippetts discussed the matter in secret many and many a time, over a cup of tea and a pile of buttered toast, in Mary's little home.

This had quickly become more luxurious, as the

fruits of Mary's toil became manifest in an increasing pile of hoarded shillings, until the single room had become two, and the hired furniture began to be supplemented by her own.

They always thought it necessary to lower their voices when this important topic was discussed, and to glance from time to time at the door, and to listen, as if they thought their precious secret was one for which all ears were on the alert.

"If we could only find out the poor mother, Tippetts," said Mary, as they talked the matter over for the hundredth time, one evening just after the beginning of the New Year, while she sat with the child on her lap, and Tippetts made the tea. "That's what I'm always saying to myself. What must she be thinking all this time? What must she be feeling? Why, it must have been enough to kill her, to go to the house again and to find he had gone!"

Tippetts scratched his head in silence for a minute. Mary Gold was rapidly training him to more refined habits and modes of speech, but he forgot them when he was surprised or perturbed.

"Yes, I dessay the poor thing was in a dreadful way!" he admitted gravely. "But, Polly, what could you do? You couldn't have left it there with that old beast, and you couldn't have found the mother without knowing where she lived. And then, seemingly, it wouldn't have been safe to take the child back to her seeing it was her brought it

to leave with Mrs. Sweech. It's a rummy thing *altogether!*"

"I'll tell you what it is though, Tippetts," went on Mary, gravely, after a pause. "I've a good mind to go back to Bristol by myself, and find out whether there isn't some talk about the loss of a child. Remember, it wasn't a common child, that could disappear and be made no fuss about. I could see, even where I sat in the shed that evening, that its clothes were lovely, and so were its mother's. And its little shirt was the finest I ever saw, with real lace, and a coronet in one corner.

"A coronet!" echoed Tippetts. "Why, that's what swells—reg'lar tip-toppers—have on their things! The young 'un must be a dook or a baronite or something like that, if he had coronets on his clothes!"

Mary frowned in a puzzled manner.

"Yes, but I don't think that can be right," said she, in a low voice. "There would have been more fuss made about the poor mite if he'd been so grand as that. No, no, Tippetts. I think it must be a poor baby that hasn't got a father—at least not one that will own it—and there's some sad secret about the life of its poor mother, or she'd never have left it where she did!"

"But, Polly," said Tippetts, thoughtfully, "folks don't put coronets on the clothes of children that ain't got no fathers!"

"They have no right to, of course," assented Mary. "But I tell you there's some history out of the common connected with my boy and his mother." And unconsciously she looked down at the child with something more than a parent's pride. "And that coronet means something, though I don't think it means that he's got a nobleman for a father, and a nobleman's wife for a mother!"

"It's a rummy thing altogether!" repeated Tippetts at length. And then, with an inspiration, he said, slapping his knee and drawing himself up, "Look here, Polly, do you ever read the newspapers?"

"Why, no, I can't say I do," answered Mary, trembling. For as she answered the question she knew what Tippetts was going to suggest, and she dreaded the separation to which the suggestion might lead.

"Well, then, you oughter," said Tippetts, energetically, as he suddenly drew back his piece of toast on perceiving that in his excitement over the conversation it had become a nice coal-black. "'Ow can you know whether there's been a fuss made about him or not, if you don't read the newspapers? I'm ashamed of you, Polly, a educated girl like you, not to take in a evening paper. I'll go out and buy yer one this minute."

Mary rose in great agitation, without uttering a word. Tippetts, who was already at the door, saw

by the expression of her face that she was deeply moved. He hesitated, and then came back to her. "Polly," said he in a low voice, "I won't fetch the paper if you don't want me to; if you're afraid of having to give the child up."

Mary turned quickly, shaking from head to foot. Her voice shook also as she answered—

"Yes, yes, Tippetts, I want you to go. What right have I to stand in the way of my boy's going back to *his friends*? What right have I to keep him one moment, if we can find his mother and those he will be safe with, Tippetts." And she stared at him with feverish eyes. "I've thought of the papers before, only—I was too weak, too wicked, to want to see them. For I know we shall find out something; I know we shall have to give him back, to give him back."

Her voice broke, and she buried her face in the baby's little shoulder. The mite put its soft hands on her face, and puckered up its own.

"Am I to go, Polly?" asked Tippetts, softly. "I can't bear to, if it's going to break your heart to part with the child."

"Yes, go, go," said Mary Gold impatiently.

Tippetts slid out of the room, reluctantly enough. The lad had grown so fond of both Mary and the child during these weeks since their arrival in London, that the thought that he was to be the means of breaking up the happy little circle they

all formed together brought the tears to his eyes.

But he saw also that Mary was right in her wish to find out the identity of the child, and he hoped against hope that the newspapers would contain nothing concerning the lost baby ; or that, if it should be necessary to restore the child to its parents, they would at least make the best acknowledgment they could of her devotion, by keeping her about the baby.

To tell the truth, however, he was not quite so innocent as he pretended about the newspaper. Tippetts was not what he would have called a "scollard," but still he could spell out anything which specially interested him, and he had recently so made out an advertisement which appeared with great regularity in the outside pages of the daily papers.

He had had some suspicions at the time, but had been reluctant to disturb Mary Gold's happy possession of her baby. When, however, she broached this matter as seriously as she had done that day, and when, moreover, he learnt for the first time that fact about the coronet on the clothes, he felt that he ought to keep silent no longer.

He went to a little shop where they knew him, and borrowed a copy of the morning's *Telegraph*, with which he promptly returned to the little room where he had left Mary.

He found her sitting by the fire, dangling a small ball before the child, who was crowing and jumping up and down in great delight.

He was struck, as he entered, by the wonderful change which had come over her face since she had first found the child. And he thought to himself, even before he handed her the paper, that he should have been quite unable to trace the slatternly, neglected, dull-looking woman of three months before in the neat, sweet-faced girl who sat before him.

Love for the abandoned child had transfigured her, had brought her back to life and happiness, to religion and a woman's noblest duties.

A shadow passed over her face as she held out her hand and took the paper. Tippetts, almost crying, pointed, without speaking, to an advertisement in one corner of the last page.

Mary read it in silence.

It was headed :

"TWO HUNDRED POUNDS REWARD !

"Whereas, on the fifteenth day of October last, a child about four months old was taken away from the house of a Professional Nurse : the above reward will be paid to any person who shall give such information as will result in the recovery of the child. Apply, with full particulars, to Messrs. Ropley and Field, Lincoln's Inn."

"That there advertisement," remarked Tippetts in

a low voice, "as been in above a month. Do you think it means 'im?" And he jerked his head in the direction of the baby.

"I'm sure it does," said Mary, who was deadly pale. "Isn't the date enough to tell you so?"

"Well, to tell you the honest truth, Polly, I didn't call to mind what date it was we come away from Bristol."

"It was the fifteenth," said Mary, whose voice was almost inaudible.

"Then you feel sure it's your baby they're after?"

"Quite sure."

"And are you going to the lawyer chaps?"

Mary shook her head.

"No; there are two kinds of lawyers, Tippets. I'll find the mother first, if I can."

"Well, Polly, there's two kinds of mothers too!" said Tippets. "And it isn't the best kind that leaves their kids with folks like old Mother Sweech!"

"Anyhow, I'll go down to Bristol and hunt about," said she decidedly. "They wouldn't know me again down there now, would they?" And she turned her face, blushing a little, towards the lad.

"That they wouldn't!" cried he heartily. "I can't hardly believe myself as you're the same!"

"Then I'll go down to-morrow!" cried Mary. "It's Sunday, so I get my whole day, and I can come back on Monday in time for the theatre."

"God bless you, Polly!" cried Tippets in a low

voice. "And I hope, for the child's sake as well as yours, as you won't find nobody to give him back to."

"I mustn't hope that—for my boy's own sake," said Mary, while the tears streamed down her cheeks.

At twelve o'clock that night, having commended her precious boy to the care of Daisy, the landlady's daughter, Mary Gold started from Paddington for Bristol.

CHAPTER XIV

DANGEROUS GROUND

IT was past three o'clock, on a raw and bitter January morning, when Mary got out of the train at Bristol Station, and made her way down to the low part of the town, where she had once lived.

She had been dreading this experience, fearful lest ugly memories of that bygone time should oppress and shame her. But, to her surprise and relief, the change which had worked in her since that time had been so great that she found no such sting as she had expected in the sight of her old haunts.

There were depths of degradation which, in her worst days, Mary had never reached; and the one temptation to which she had given way she had now so thoroughly conquered that she could scarcely realise or remember the attraction which those wretched little public-houses had once had for her.

She felt rather like a person who is dreaming

again an old dream, than like a wanderer returning to his old haunts.

After a little hesitation, as it was now past four o'clock, she resolved upon rousing the keeper of a poor lodging-house, where she had often stayed. And here her heart leapt up to discover that the woman did not recognise her.

When Mary, with some bashful hesitation, told her that she was "Crazy Poll," the woman was sincerely kind.

"Come inside, my dear," she said quickly. "I'm sure I'm very glad to see you've got straight again. I was one of those who always said you were fit for better things than you'd got down to. Come in and tell me all about yourself."

"But I don't like to keep you up at this time in the morning," said Mary. "You go to bed again, and I'll tell you all about it when you get up."

But the woman, who was genuinely interested, insisted on lighting a fire and giving the half-frozen girl a cup of hot coffee. And, while she did so, she answered Mary's questions about the inhabitants of the neighbourhood.

"What has become of everybody?" echoed she, in answer to one inquiry. "Well, let's see; I forget when it was you went away."

Mary smiled a little. Her very insignificance had prevented the date of her departure from Bristol from becoming known.

"It was in October," said Mary.

"Oh, well, things are pretty much the same here. Bill Peters is dead, and his wife's gone away. You knew them?"

"Oh, yes."

"And nothing much else has happened except the row about that child—you know—that was lost."

"What child?" asked Mary, trembling.

"Why, Lord Shelvin's son, to be sure!" Mary kept very still, but her heart seemed to give a great leap. The woman went on: "It seems his young widow, Lady Shelvin, went off her head after her husband's death, and brought the child one night to old Mother Sweech's. Fancy that! And left him there! Of course without saying who she was! And there was a great row, and they came, a lot of them, to the house that very night, and there was a fearful rumpus, for the child was gone!"

Mary nodded her head. She was shaking like a leaf.

"And the lawyers came down, and the police, and they made old Sweech make a clean breast of it. And she said she left the child in the house, and went away to pawn its clothes, and that when she came back the child had disappeared! And they made careful inquiries about the time, and it seemed she'd told the truth. And then one of the lawyer gentlemen, a Mr. Snoode or Snode, came forward and said he'd seen a lady in black throw a child into

the river. And it was just about the time Mrs. Sweech was out of her house. So, as the poor lady is certainly mad, it seems she must have gone back to Mrs. Sweech's house, and taken the child away, and thrown it into the water herself. It's a dreadful thing, isn't it?"

Mary could only bow her head.

"Of course they hushed the thing up as well as they could, but the river had to be dragged, and I don't know what. And they found a dead baby some days after in the river, underneath a barge, and the nurses said it was the little Lord Shelvin."

Mary started up with a cry.

"They say that! What did the mother say?"

"Oh, poor thing, she said it was not her baby, that her baby would never have looked at all like that. And she declared she never saw the child after she left it with Mrs. Sweech. But of course nobody pays much attention to what she says. And now the late Lord Shelvin's cousin, Captain Garrington, has come into the title and the property. And they do say poor Lady Liliast's ravings are something awful, and that she says he is a murderer, and never meant her boy to grow up, and that it was he made away with it."

Mary listened as quietly as she could, though she was shaking in every limb.

"And where is she now, this lady, the mother?" she asked at last, in a hoarse and tremulous voice.

"Oh, she's at Drake's Hall, her husband's place, a few miles away from here," she answered.

"And where's this Captain Garrington?"

"He's Lord Shelvin now, and he's in the house, too. Folks do say he isn't as much cut up as he pretends; but he says he's not going to turn her out, and so she has her own wing of the house to herself, where she's only like a prisoner, poor lady. And the late Lord Shelvin's mother is a sort of gaoler, for she takes the present lord's part, they say, in everything. He's a handsome, taking sort of man; I've seen him drive in in his dog-cart, lots of times, and always with an eye on the girls. And they say he has everybody and everything up at the Hall under his thumb."

"I should like to see the place they tell that story about," observed Mary Gold, when she had recovered her self-possession a little. "Is it a walking distance from here?"

"Oh, yes! a matter of five or six miles I should say. You branch off to the left from the Bath road. You can get pretty near to the house at one place, and as it stands high you get a good view of it. It's worth a walk to see it, for it's one of the prettiest houses in this part, everybody says. It's all red brick, and tall twisted chimneys, and ivy."

"I shall go," said Mary, "as soon as it's light."

The woman seemed amused by her enthusiasm, which, however, woke no curiosity in her. And

she proceeded to ask Mary some questions about herself, which the girl answered, of course without mention of the baby.

The information she had just obtained showed her how cautious she must be. And it was with a mind full of doubts and fears, and a heart torn by indescribable pain that, soon after seven o'clock, she set out on her walk.

Not once had she ever conceived the possibility of the abandoned child being such an important personage as he had now proved to be. Not once, either, had it occurred to her to doubt the perfect sanity of the mother at the time of her strange errand. She had seen this Lady Liliás, she had touched her, spoken to her. And as she looked back, Mary remembered the face, the voice, the shrinking manner.

And as she thought, she asked herself whether Lady Liliás might not be sane enough to recognise her child if she saw him? And if the present Lord Shelvin had not been in some way connected with the poor lady's rash act?

And then there came back to her mind those words which she had overheard when she hid herself away from the man who had tempted her to drink—

"Mr. Snode, you 'are right. If the child gets back alive, we are done for!"

And Snode was the name of the man who had

since declared that he saw Lady Liliass throw her child into the river !

Mary shuddered as she thought of it. A deadly paralysing fear seized her, and made her ask herself whether it would not be better for the child, her baby, to remain with her in her humble little home in the two garrets off the Tottenham Court Road, than to return to the splendid mansion which was really his own, where his very life would hardly be safe.

In the meantime, however, she was more than ever determined to see Drake's Hall, and if possible some of its occupants. To ask boldly for an interview with Lady Liliass was more than she dared do ; especially as she felt sure that such a request from a stranger would excite suspicion, and that in any case the boon would hardly be granted.

It was past nine o'clock, and the sun had begun to shine through the mist, when Mary came in sight of Drake's Hall.

Seen thus for the first time in the bright, clear light of the morning, with veils of grey mist hanging in the now almost leafless woods for a background, the long, ivy-covered house, with its mullioned windows and its quaint Tudor chimneys, looked so beautiful, so imposing, that Mary felt, overwhelmed by the thought that it belonged to her baby, the little creature who passed his days in her arms, who shrieked with joy at the sight of her.

She slackened her pace, and walked along the road at the bottom of the hill, drinking in the beauty of the place, feasting her eyes on every gable, every turret, and saying to herself softly as she looked—

“He shall have it, he shall have it back some day!”

As soon as she got to a point in the road where a plantation of young larches and firs hid the house from sight, Mary saw on her left the entrance to a private road, with a small lodge on one side of it, half hidden among the trees.

A little further along the road she came to a lane, which ran up the side of the hill among the woods. It was the very lane down which poor Lady Liliast had carried her baby on the evening when she escaped with him from the house.

Opposite to the entrance of this lane there was a rough path over the fields, leading to the lower part of the straggling village. Mary lingered a little at this point, wondering whether she should go down among the cottages, to try to pick up some casual information about Drake's Hall and its occupants, such as would be given to an interested stranger as a matter of course.

But she decided that she would take the turning up the lane, and try to get nearer to the great house itself.

She had not gone far up the steep ascent when she

came, on rounding a corner in the lane, upon a dwelling so pretty and picturesque that she paused, and uttered an involuntary "Oh !" at the sight.

It was a large cottage, with a steep red roof, and a rustic porch over which the now dead creepers hung like a rough brown netting, still bearing a beauty of their own in their promise of greater beauty by and by. Tufts of green moss and grass, and of brown and yellow lichen gave colour to the roof, while a trail of dark ivy up one wall added a look of cosy comfort to the dwelling.

The garden was large, and gave signs, even now, of being well-kept and productive ; while the tall hedge which surrounded it, a sturdy border of holly and yew, was neatly clipped and as solid-looking as a wall.

As Mary stood looking at the cottage, with her face full of frank admiration, and a wistful thought in her mind that it was the very place she would have chosen to live in with her baby, the door opened and a man came out.

In an instant Mary recognised him, and her face became crimson, as she turned quickly away and walked on up the hill. For it was the man who had given her his purse on that memorable October night, the man whose money had taken her and the child to London.

He glanced at her with interest, but, as Mary was thankful to see, there was no recognition in his eyes.

How could he guess that the sweet-faced young woman in the brown skirt and neat fawn-coloured cloth jacket, whose bright wavy brown hair showed under the brown velvet toque and brown veil, was the bedraggled, haggard woman on whom he had taken pity three months ago ?

Mary went on at a rapid rate, with her heart beating fast.

In that one glance they had exchanged, each had felt an interest in the other. She, of course, felt that her heart went out to this man, with the handsome face and honest eyes, who had shown pity and charity to her before. He, on his side, was struck by some charm of modesty, of sweetness in the woman he believed to be a stranger. In her appearance he saw an indefinable charm which he had never before seen in any woman.

As the ascent grew less steep at the top of the hill, Mary found a narrow path into the woods on her left hand. As this must bring her nearer to the great house she struck into it, and, delighted with the beauty of the place, with the damp, earthy, fresh smell of a wood in winter-time, with the glimpses of the river and the valley she caught through openings among the trees, she went on quickly, catching sight now and then of the red turrets of Drake's Hall, and finding herself getting nearer to the building with each step she took.

A by-path, with its charm of firs and pines, and

the brown carpet formed by their cones and spines, drew her for a moment out of her direct way. She followed this path for a few steps, and came suddenly in sight of two people, a man and a woman, standing together a little way off in a small clearing among the trees.

They were lovers, evidently ; he was kissing her as Mary caught sight of them. And it was equally evident that this meeting was an illicit one, for the man, who was young, good-looking, and well-dressed, was clearly a gentleman by position ; while it was equally apparent to Mary's observant eye that the rather pretty, dark-eyed girl, with her over-trimmed hat and ill-worn cape trimmed with imitation fur, was in a much lower social position.

A shade of pain crossed Mary's face as she quickly withdrew out of sight again and continued her walk towards the house.

The wood, however, ended suddenly in a wide expanse of meadow, where some horses were turned out to grass.

And on the other side of this meadow the stables and outbuildings of the house began.

Clearly she could go no further in this direction, unless she wished to address herself to one of the stablemen, two of whom, from a gate, on the opposite side of the meadow, were already watching her curiously.

So she turned to go back, and reached the game-

keeper's pretty cottage much more quickly than she had left it. The handsome man whom she had before seen at the door was now leaning over the gate, and it struck Mary at once that he must have been watching for the return of the mysterious stranger.

As soon as she emerged from the wood he came out and addressed her, with a smiling, manly manner which recalled so many memories that she trembled and reddened deeply as she answered.

"I beg pardon," said he, "but I see you are a stranger here. Can I direct you anywhere? I see you have lost your way."

For a moment she could not answer. She was afraid that her voice might betray her; she could not bear to think that he should remember her in her time of degradation.

And yet at the same time she felt an irresistible belief that this straightforward, good-hearted man, whose every look and word seemed to her to bear the stamp of good faith and good feeling, was the very person who could best help her in her quest.

At least, she thought, there could be no harm in confessing to him her errand.

"I wish," said she, in a voice which was scarcely more than a whisper, "to see Lady Lillas Shelvin."

The gamekeeper started, and a look of pain and sorrow darted swiftly across his face.

"Ah," said he, in a voice full of feeling, "that is

impossible, I'm afraid." Then, with pardonable curiosity, he added courteously, "Do you know Lady Liliass?"

Mary shook her head.

"I know," she said, in a low voice, "that she has had great sorrow, and that she is—is—hardly herself. At least, so they told me."

"Yet—you wish to see her?"

"Yes. Is there any possibility of it, without having to see her in the presence of—others?"

"I'm afraid not."

"Then there is another, an old lady. Could I see her, do you think?"

"Old Lady Shelvin? She has lived a very retired life lately. I don't know—— Would you have any objection to telling me your name, or the nature of your visit? If you would do that, and would wait here in my cottage while I went up to the house, I would take your message and see what I could do." As Mary drew back, he added—"My sister will be back for church soon, and will be very glad to see you. She's only gone up to the Hall with some eggs."

Even as he spoke, a crackling noise was heard among the branches of the leafless trees and brambles, and the next moment, there stepped out of the very path by which Mary had come, the black-eyed girl whom she had seen kissing the gentleman in the wood.

Mary started, and grew red again.

"Hallo, Jack!" cried the girl in surprise.

"Well, Hannah, and did you hear how Lady Lilius is to-day?"

The girl tossed her head rather contemptuously.

"No, I didn't. I didn't ask," said she flippantly. "If I had, you may be sure the answer would have been, 'Much the same.' And who's this?" she added, with frank impertinence, as she turned towards Mary, who, however, had already resolved not to give her name in the presence of this girl.

Jack Mallory frowned at his sister.

"This young lady," said he, "wants to see Lady Lilius or Lady Shelvin."

Hannah raised her eyebrows.

"Then I'm afraid she has a poor chance of seeing either of them," said she promptly, "for neither of them sees any strangers now. The best thing you can do," she went on, with a grand air, turning to Mary, "is to find out whether Lord Shelvin will see you, and then ask him if you can see the old lady. Everything is left in his hands, you know, now he's master here."

"Master!" cried Mary, jealous on the part of her babe. "But it isn't known yet whether he is the master. He's only Captain Garrington if the late Lord Shelvin's son is alive!"

CHAPTER XV

FAREWELL

JACK MALLORY started, and Hannah drew a long breath of amazement.

“Well, I never! What cheek!” said the latter at last, with a laugh.

“Be quiet, Hannah,” said Jack sternly.

He had been struck from the first by the undercurrent of steady determination he had observed in the stranger’s manner. A rush of hope, indefinable, hardly to be realised, invaded his mind and gladdened his eyes as he looked at the flushed cheeks of the quiet-mannered woman. He, too, was aware that there was need to be cautious in dealing with these matters; so, after a short silence, he said gravely—

“If you are able to stay down here a week or so, or if you belong to this neighbourhood, I will see what can be done in a day or two. Both the ladies have suffered from severe shocks lately, and it is really, as my sister has told you, a difficult matter to

see either of them. Indeed, I can hardly ask you to hope to see Lady Liliass."

"Thank you," said Mary, who could scarcely control her voice. "I'm sorry to say I must go back to-morrow morning. I'm engaged at a theatre, and I have to be back there to-morrow night."

"A theatre!" cried Hannah, with a look of the primmest horror and disgust. "Oh, then, I'm sure Lady Shelvin would never see you. She's very particular, very particular indeed, about the sort of people she allows to come inside the Hall!"

Impatient and angry, Jack Mallory made his sister a sign to go indoors. And Mary noticed that, flippant and flighty as Hannah was, she quailed and grew subdued on the instant when she saw that her brother was roused to real anger.

With a little nod, intended as a propitiatory farewell to the stranger, she went into the cottage, where Mary saw her watching with keen curiosity from behind the muslin curtains of the nearest window.

Jack hastened to apologise for his sister.

"She's been spoilt," said he, "and as she's as ignorant as she's vain, she makes all sorts of ridiculous mistakes. I hope you'll excuse her silliness."

Mary thought to herself that he probably underrated, if not Hannah's intelligence, at least her cunning. But she could only accept the apology at once, and turn to a more interesting subject.

"I understand," she said, in a low voice, as she did not wish Hannah to hear any more than could be helped, "it's useless to think of seeing the poor ladies. But—could you—would you—tell me if Messrs. Ropley and Field are the solicitors of the present or of the late Lord Shelvin?"

Jack turned pale at the question. Looking her earnestly in the eyes, he said, in a low voice—

"Before I answer, let me ask you this—where are you going now—this moment—if I answer you?"

Mary, rather surprised, answered promptly—

"Back to London by the next train."

"Let me see you on your way," said he at once.

Mary assented by a bend of the head only; and, with a word to his sister, Jack followed the stranger down the lane.

When they had reached the bottom, and she had led the way in the direction of Bristol, it was Jack who spoke first.

"Please forgive me if I'm too abrupt. But why do you want to know about the lawyers? Is it anything—about—the child?"

"Yes," answered Mary, who was shaking from head to foot.

"Because, if so," went on Jack, with energy and deep feeling, "I can tell you her ladyship, poor Lady Liliās, his mother, did me the honour to trust me with her confidence about him, and the dangers she believed him to be in. And"—here he looked her

straight in the eyes, very solemnly, very simply—"you may trust me too."

"I'm sure of it," whispered Mary back. "Well, then, I--I know where the child is. He's alive--well. I've got him. And he's the joy of my heart!"

As she whispered these words, jerking them out, as if with difficulty, the tears ran down her face.

"And it will break my heart to give him up," she went on brokenly. "But I must do what is best for him; I mustn't stand with my selfish feelings between him and his rights."

"God bless you!" cried Jack.

And seizing her hand, he grasped it in a grip that sent a long thrill to her heart.

The next moment, however, he conquered his emotion, and returned swiftly to the practical side of the matter.

"Now tell me how you got hold of the child," said he, with a most keen and scrutinising glance.

Mary met his look fearlessly.

"I'll tell you," said she, "though it's not too pleasant for me. For it's a confession."

Jack did not interrupt her by a word; and he turned his eyes away, from a feeling of delicacy roused by her tone.

"Do you remember," she went on in a low voice, "meeting a woman by the riverside on that night when the baby was lost? She was coming back to

fetch a child, whom you had discovered in a warehouse there.”—Jack started and stared at her, but without more recognition than before.—“I was the woman—— And the little Lord Shelvin was the child!”

“Good heaven!” cried Jack.

“I had seen the lady in her black widow’s dress,” went on Mary, “knock at Mrs. Sweech’s door. I had warned her; but she turned away from me with a shudder. I saw her go inside the house; I saw her come out. I presently saw Mrs. Sweech come out—without the child, but with a bundle, which she took straight to the pawnbroker’s at the corner.”

“She confessed that,” said Jack in a hoarse voice, “after it had been found out.”

“I went into the house to find out what had become of the child, and I found it, half-suffocated, cold, and blue in the face, in a box of straw in the scullery.”

Jack growled out something between his teeth, and clenched his fists.

“I couldn’t leave it there to be murdered. I took it away. Two men met me at the door, friends, I think, of the man who now calls himself Lord Shelvin.”

“Dowells and Snode,” said Jack.

“Yes, yes,” assented Mary. “And they tried to get the child from me; and then I heard the one

say to the other that they must not bring the child back—alive ! ”

Jack could say nothing. But he was as white as a dead man.

“ I tricked them ; I left the living child where you found it ; and I threw something into the water.”

“ That’s what gave them the idea of saying Lady Lilius had drowned her child,” cried Jack, who was shaking like a leaf.

“ And I have kept the child ever since ; but until to-day I didn’t know his name.”

There was a short silence. They had reached that part of the road whence they could get a good view of the Hall and of the meadow to the right of it. And as they looked, both saw Hannah running as fast as she could in the direction of the great house.

Jack started.

“ My sister ! ” cried he. “ What is she going to do ? ”

But the next moment he frowned, his face dark with suspicion.

“ She is going to warn Lord Shelvin,” said he, between his set teeth, “ or rather Captain Garrington, that there has been some one here who knows something about the child ! You must make haste. You must not let them catch you. Go to the lawyers ; Mr. Ropley was old Lord Shelvin’s solicitor ; he

will listen to you, and I hope he will believe you. But it's a difficult business."

"*You* believe me, don't you?" pleaded Mary, in a low voice.

He turned to her at once, with a look of splendid confidence.

"Absolutely. You are one of Heaven's true women; I'm sure of it."

"You trust me—even after what you remember?"

"I remember only that you have saved the life of my master's son, and—I think—that he has saved yours."

Mary bent her head, crying.

"Now make haste," repeated Jack. "I don't want that blackguard, the Captain, to track you out. And don't write to me: I can't trust my small household as I should like to. But tell me where you live. And, please God, I'll see my master's son again! And live to see him my master himself."

"Amen!" said Mary solemnly. "If care and prayer can keep him safe, no harm will come to him."

She repeated the name and number of the street where she lived to him; and then, with one hearty clasp of the hand, with one long, strangely moving look of the eyes, they parted without another word.

CHAPTER XVI

COLD COMFORT

THE artful Hannah had indeed, as Jack, her brother, guessed, only waited to be alone, when she started at a rapid pace for Drake's Hall, delighted to have an opportunity of making herself useful to Lord Shelvin, as Captain Garrington was now called.

She thought herself lucky in finding him before reaching the house, where she had lately been less well received by the servants, who guessed the extent of their master's interest in the vain and deceitful girl.

She caught sight of him as he was leaving the stables, and she came close to the hedge which separated the meadow from the corner of the kitchen garden, and called to him softly.

He turned, and nodded to her, rather annoyed to see her again so soon after their meeting in the wood. He was a man who ran after every fresh

pretty face which came in his way, but he was too cold and too selfish ever to feel a genuine affection or passion for any woman. He liked to amuse himself with them when it suited his whim, but he disliked extremely what he called "persecution" even at the fairest of hands.

This little country wench, he felt, was already, beginning to be a bit of a bore, now that he saw so much of her.

Perhaps Hannah, limited as her intellect was, had some inkling of this state of things ; and it made her the more anxious to be of use to him.

"My lord," she whispered, as he came up in a very leisurely manner, and with a slight frown on his face ; "I've just heard something you ought to know. There's been a woman about here"—Lord Shelvin frowned, scenting more "persecution"—"a woman who wants to see Lady Lilius ; and who says you're not Lord Shelvin if that baby is alive !"

Lord Shelvin was more affected than she had expected by this intelligence. He turned deadly pale ; and as he stood before her without at first speaking or looking at her, Hannah saw his lips curl up, till he showed his teeth in a manner which made her shiver.

"Oh !" cried she, faintly, astonished at the effect of her words.

He did not seem to hear or heed her.

"*The* woman, by Jove !" he muttered below his

breath. Then, turning upon her so quickly and fiercely that she was startled, he asked, "Where is she now?"

"Gone. Gone down the hill, I don't know which way, with my brother!"

"Mallory! D—— him!" said Lord Shelvin furiously. "He's the devil's own son; I hate the fellow!"

"Oh, my lord, you won't send him, send us—away?" faltered Hannah in alarm.

"No. I shall keep him here to have him under my own eye," said Lord Shelvin sharply. "And you must keep a sharp look-out upon him, do you hear? You must find out all you can about this woman, who she is, where she lives, and anything else you can pick up."

"She says she acts in a theatre, a theatre in London," faltered Hannah, who began to wish now that she had said nothing about the stranger.

"A theatre!" echoed Lord Shelvin. "And—she wants to see Lady Liliastown about the wretched child who—who was drowned?"

"Yes, my lord. Perhaps—at least she seemed to talk as if—as if it wasn't drowned."

He turned upon her with such fury in his face that the girl almost shrieked; and he was obliged to modify his tone in order that she might not draw attention upon them by a fit of screaming, or some other demonstration.

"You know — everybody knows, that he was drowned, and that he's buried in the church down there, and that I'm having a stone put up in the church to his memory. I must hurry them up with it! I must hurry them up!" he said, tapping the ground savagely with his foot. "And, Hannah," he went on in a different tone, with a keen look at the girl's face, "it's lucky for you he was drowned, you know, or you wouldn't get the presents I've promised you! I'm writing up to a London jeweller's to-day, on your account. And — and look here," continued he, as the bribe brought the colour back into the cheeks of the vain girl, "don't let your confounded brother know anything about your having come here to see me. And don't come up here unless I send for you. When I want to see you, I'll come to you. And you must keep your eyes and your ears open, and tell me everything. There!"

He gave a glance round, satisfied himself that there were no prying eyes about, kissed and dismissed her.

But, try as he would to divest himself of his fears, and to treat the subject lightly even to himself, he was oppressed by that miserable doubt from which he had never, since that October night, been free, that there was more trouble in store from that "other woman" who had taken away the baby.

In the meantime Mary had caught the 12.45 train

from Bristol, and arrived at Paddington at four o'clock.

When she got back to her lodging, and held "her" boy in her arms once more, her heart was too full for her to utter a word as she clung to him and caressed him.

He had already learnt to utter a sound which was supposed to be her name, and he expressed his delight at getting her back again with every one of those sweet, innocent demonstrations which go straight to the heart of a woman, kicking his little legs out, clutching her round the neck, opening his small mouth at her in what was politely called a kiss.

He was a beautiful child, straight and strong; the dark fringe of hair which had formed but a scanty covering to his head when she first found him had now given place to a downy silky crop of soft, fair hair; and she gave a sigh of dismay as she remembered that this very change, which had greatly improved his appearance, would add to the difficulty of establishing his identity.

On the following morning she presented herself, without the child, at the office of Messrs. Ropley and Field, and, on stating that she had come about the advertisement, a copy of which she produced, she was at once admitted to an interview.

She had scarcely entered, and answered half a dozen questions, however, when Mary's heart sank

within her, as she recognised how great the difficulties in her path were.

In the first place, the evidence on which she had placed most reliance, that afforded by her production of the baby's little shirt and underclothes, he dismissed at once as hardly worth a moment's attention.

"Those may be proved to be the clothes of the young Lord Shelvin, of course," admitted he. "But we shall want proof other than your own word as to how you came by them."

"They were on the child when I found him in Mrs. Sweech's house and carried him away," pleaded Mary.

Mr. Ropley shrugged his shoulders.

"Nobody saw you bring the child out of the house?"

"No-o-o."

"How are we to know that you did bring him out? Perhaps you can prove these are his clothes, but as he had admittedly been plundered of his clothing in that house, what proof can we have that, since you admit you went there when Sweech was out, you did not go only to steal the clothes?"

Mary was aghast. This view had never occurred to her.

"You understand," Mr. Ropley went on, "I'm not accusing you of doing so. But this is a case

where absolute proof is required. The very fact of your not having come forward until you saw that advertisement offering the reward goes against you, as you must see."

"I didn't know who the child was," pleaded Mary. The lawyer shrugged his shoulders.

"Can you bring any one to confirm your story, or any part of it?"

"I can bring the baby himself," said Mary. "Surely his mother, or the nurses, will know him! It's not so very long ago—three months."

Mr. Ropley did not look hopeful.

"Babies are very much alike," said he drily. "I confess I don't know one from another. I want better witnesses for you than that."

"Well," said Mary, "I can bring you a lad to whom I told the whole story that very night, and who saw me with the baby."

"Who is he?"

"He works in a stable, and his name—his name—I forget his real name," admitted Mary, reddening, "but they call him Tippetts."

Mr. Ropley put down his pen with a frosty little smile.

"I'm afraid you will hardly be able to establish the identity of the child with Lord Shelvin's son on the sole authority of a lad named or nicknamed Tippetts."

"Then there's one other person," said Mary,

blushing more than ever, and looking down. "He's one of Lord Shelvin's gamekeepers."

"Come, that's better," said Mr. Ropley, taking up his pen again. "And what can he prove?"

"He saw the baby that night. He saw me take it away with me."

"And he knew whose child it was?"

"Oh, no. Neither he nor I knew that. But he saw it, and he saw it with me."

"Very well. I will see you and him both here together, and the child too. I will write to Lord Shelvin——"

But Mary drew back at once.

"I would rather see you here without his knowing—till afterwards," said she.

The lawyer looked at her keenly. This reluctance to meet a member of the family looked suspicious.

"You see," she added quickly, "he is the very person most interested in not acknowledging the identity of the child."

"Quite true. But he is bound to know. You can't prove the child's claim to his own title and his own property without his knowledge, can you?"

"I should like to see one of the ladies first."

"Ah! but ladies are easily worked upon. At the present moment Lady Liliás is in such a state of mind that she would acknowledge any decent-looking child as her own. She still persists, you see, in saying she did no harm to the child, that she did

not throw it into the river, as she was seen to do. She is hysterical, broken down. I could not allow her feelings to be worked upon by introducing the subject to her."

There was sense in what he said, as Mary saw.

"Will you write to old Lady Shelvin then?" asked she.

"If you please. I will communicate with Lady Shelvin, and then write to you. What is your address?"

But Mary would not give it. She was too much afraid of Captain Garrington and his agents, although she had sense enough to see that she must not acknowledge this. She said she would call again, and went away with a heavy heart.

On reaching the house where she lodged, however, a pleasant surprise greeted her. The landlady's daughter met her, and told her that a gentleman, "Such a good-looking young man, too," had called to see her, and on hearing that she was out, had promised to call again.

"And here he is!" cried the girl, glancing out of window as she spoke.

And Mary, to her great joy, recognised Jack Mallory, looking, she thought, in his grey tweed suit and brown hat, as manly-looking and handsome a man as she had ever seen.

She opened the door to him herself, and greeted him with a rather sorrowful face.

On hearing the reason of this mood, Jack looked grave.

"I've been thinking about it all night," said he, "so that this morning I felt I must come up, and I got leave and started early. It's a precious difficult thing to turn a man out of a position he's taken ; the law and all is against you ! A man like Lord Shelvin, too, who's not too scrupulous. I'm pretty sure my sister went up yesterday to tell him about your coming, though she stands out she only went across the meadow to watch which way we went."

"Now that you've come," said Mary anxiously, "will you see the baby ?"

"Rather !" said Jack heartily. "I didn't mean to go without a sight of him !"

But here again there was a disappointment in store for Mary, for when the gamekeeper had come into the little sitting-room, and Mary had taken the child from the floor, where he was playing with Tippetts, and had placed him in Jack's arms, all that the latter could say was—

"What a beautiful child ! Why, it's never the same as the one I saw in the warehouse that night !"

Mary uttered an exclamation of acute distress.

"But isn't there any likeness in him to his father—his mother ?" she asked plaintively.

Jack looked and looked, but he had to shake his head at last, ruefully enough. He had, of course, never seen either parent at that stage of develop-

ment, and he could see no likeness to either as he had known them except in the fact that the baby had blue eyes, and that that was the colour of his mother's.

"You'll come with me to the lawyer's, though, with the child?" she asked anxiously. "You can dwell upon the eyes, you know," she added piteously.

Jack said he was ready to go and do what he could. So he called a cab at once, and Mary, and he, and Tippetts, and the precious baby, all started for Lincoln's Inn together.

Unfortunately, the very fact of Jack Mallory's being forthcoming so promptly, with Tippetts too, increased the suspicion with which Mr. Ropley looked upon the party. He received them, however, courteously, took Tippetts into a room apart, and inquired what he knew.

The lad gave the whole story of the night's adventures quite truly and simply, and with an air of sincerity which the lawyer noted to his credit.

"And you say you had known this woman some time, and had never before seen her with a baby?"

"Never before, sir."

"You had known her by name?"

"Ye-es, sir."

"What name?" asked Mr. Ropley quickly, perceiving that the lad hesitated.

Tippetts shuffled from one foot to the other. However, Mary had adjured him to tell the whole

truth, whatever question he was asked, so he mumbled out at last, in a shamefaced whisper—

“By the name of ‘Crazy Poll,’ sir.”

Mr. Ropley almost started.

“‘Crazy Poll!’ That most respectable-looking young woman in the next room?”

Tippets nodded. He felt as if he must choke. What a confession to have to make about good, handsome, kind-hearted Mary! The fact, too, seemed scarcely conceivable even to himself as he communicated it.

Mr. Ropley evidently thought so too, for he dismissed the lad with a nod, and called into his inner office Mary and Jack Mallory.

“And now,” said he, “let me see the child.”

Mary brought the baby forward, and showed him off with much pride. There was something in her manner, in the look of affection in her eyes as she looked at the boy, which made the lawyer ask sharply—

“You seem to look upon the child as your own?”

“So he is my own,” retorted Mary with fire, “until I find a woman with a better right to him.”

It was a fair answer, and it seemed to impress Mr. Ropley rather favourably. He gave her one more look, and then turned to Jack Mallory.

“Well,” said he “so you are in the service of the family? You have seen the child, then, Lord Shelvin’s son, in his own home?”

"Yes, sir."

"And you believe this to be that same child you saw there?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do you recognise it?"

Jack looked at the baby, and then regretfully at Mary.

"Can't say I do, sir. It was three months ago, you see, since I saw him at Drake's Hall, and then he was little more than a bundle of fine clothes. He wasn't the strapping boy he is now."

"On what, then, do you base your belief that this is the son of the late Lord Shelvin?"

"I believe what she says, sir," said he simply.

"Is that all?" said the lawyer, contemptuously.

"He can prove he saw the baby with me on the night the child was lost," put in Mary, eagerly, "and after the child had been taken away from Mrs. Sweech's."

"Ah!" said Mr. Ropley. "Where was that?"

"On the quay at Riverside, Bristol. I found the child lying on some sacks inside a warehouse, and a moment after she came up and took it away. I was looking for the house of Mrs. Sweech, and when I got there, which was only a few minutes later, I found that the child had been taken away from there."

"And you think the child you saw this young woman take away was Lord Shelvin?"

"Yes."

"Had you any reason at the time for thinking that the child did not belong to this woman who came and fetched it away from the spot where you found it?"

"No-o-o," admitted Jack.

"And do you recognise this woman as the woman whom you saw with the child on the quay that night?"

Jack looked shyly at Mary Gold, and reddened.

"I believe it to be the same woman," said he, sturdily; "but, frankly, she is so much changed that—well, no, I don't recognise her."

Mary gave a long, shivering sigh. The lawyer turned to her with a short laugh.

"There were reasons," pleaded she, "why he didn't know me. I—I was different then! They used," she said, in a low voice, "to call me 'Crazy Poll.'"

Clearly Mr. Ropley did not believe her. However, he only said rather drily—

"Well, I will write to Lady Shelvin. And, if you still refuse to give me your address, you must call again. Call this day week."

And so they were dismissed; and they all emerged, crestfallen and disappointed, from the lawyer's office. All, that is to say, but the person chiefly concerned, the baby; he laughed and crowed, and looked about him as happily as if the

question at issue had not been whether he should pass his life as Greville, Lord Shelvin, owner of Drake's Hall, a large estate and a handsome fortune, or as the nameless child of a poor ballet girl.

CHAPTER XVII

A PRISONER

THEY had sent the cab away, and Tippetts, feeling rather shy of obtruding himself, made an excuse to leave Mary and Jack at the entrance of Lincoln's Inn. He must get back to his work, he said, and by a short cut which Mary could not take with the baby.

Mary turned very sorrowfully to Jack.

"And you," she said, "you will go by a short cut too, won't you?"

Jack was in the lowest possible spirits.

"Mayn't I come with you?" he asked in a low voice. "I—I have something to say to you, an apology to make."

So he made it as he went along.

"I couldn't tell such a lie," pleaded he, "as to say I recognised you. It's as much as I can do to believe it now. It's only now and then, when you're looking at the baby, I see a look in your eyes that I saw then. But it's not to be called recognition. You're a new woman since then, Miss Gold."

"My boy's done that," replied she, as she hugged the child to her breast. "What would you have done, if you'd known then that the child was your old master's? You wouldn't have trusted me with him, would you?"

But Jack, after a moment's thought, answered—

"I don't know. But I think I should. For you looked as if you loved him then, remember, so much that I took him for your own!"

"Do you think, now, we shall get Lady Shelvin to see him?"

"I don't know. It all lies with Lord Shelvin, I'm afraid. He does what he likes with her."

Mary shuddered.

"Then I shall try Lady Liliass's father and mother," said she, desperately, "if they're alive."

"Her father is alive. He's Earl Gillingham, of Gillingham Towers, in Norfolk. If only he would believe you, the child would be a deal safer there than at Drake's Hall."

"Why did Lady Liliass bring the child away?" asked Mary, in a very low voice.

"Because she didn't trust him in the same house with his cousin," replied Jack in the same tone, after a moment's hesitation.

"Then I won't take him there, and I'm glad I didn't give Mr. Ropley my address," said Mary promptly.

"So am I," said Jack gravely. "It would be

a bad exchange for the poor child, to go back to a house where he wasn't wanted, from the care of a good woman like you !”

Mary drew a long breath.

“I'm not good,” she cried breathlessly, with the tears in her eyes. “Oh, how could you think I am ? Don't you remember ?”

The pathetic tone of her voice made Jack wince. He answered in a very low voice, which thrilled Mary through and through—

“Then, Miss Gold, your way of looking at things and mine are not the same ; for if I knew of a word stronger than good I should use it in speaking of you !”

They stopped, for they had reached Oxford Street, and Mary knew that Jack had to go back to Bristol that very day. He held out his hand.

“May I come and see you again ?” asked he in a low voice. “You and—the young master ?”

Mary could not speak. She only answered him by a smile, full of gratitude and sweetness, as she returned the pressure of his hand, and moved away, to return, strangely comforted under all her disappointment, to her lodging.

Jack had taken precautions to hide the fact that his absence was to visit London ; but on his return he no longer concealed the fact that he had been there, when he was taxed with it by his sister. He would give her no particulars, however, although

she did her best to worm what she could out of him, to report to Lord Shelvin.

The Viscount was not surprised when, on the following morning, old Lady Shelvin handed him a letter which she had received from Mr. Ropley, giving an account of the appearance of the alleged child of the late Lord Shelvin.

He turned very white, although he affected to treat the matter lightly. He was annoyed to find that the old lady was anxious to see the child.

"I can't see what good it would do," said he shortly, "to bring the child here! Some wretched little workhouse brat, who will be brought by a whining woman who has stolen some of the real child's clothes! It's all the fault of that offered reward. I told Ropley not to offer one; I knew we should be inundated at once by a host of spurious babies!"

"But, Hugh, remember Liliast insisted, as she had a right to insist. And there was no mention in the advertisement either of the name of the place he was stolen from, or of the woman in whose care he was left."

"This woman has found out all the particulars. Two hundred pounds is enough to set the wits of these people to work. You will regret it if you have the woman here."

"I think Liliast ought to see the child," said Lady Shelvin in a low voice.

"What ! Surely, aunt, you would never be so rash ! In her state of mind it might kill her. And what good would it, could it do ?"

"I believe in the mother's instinct, Hugh. I believe she would recognise her own child."

Lord Shelvin did not answer for a few minutes. Then he said, rather dryly—

"Well, we will try her. My own opinion is that of Mr. Ropley, that she would pretend to recognise any decent-looking child as her own."

"Then you will send for this child ?"

"Yes. Leave it to me."

Lady Shelvin agreed to this, and promised to prepare Lady Lilius for the interview.

This was a difficult and delicate matter, as they had all taken it for granted that the accepted story was true, and that the baby who was buried in the family vault in the church at the bottom of the hill was the unhappy infant Lord Shelvin.

Lady Shelvin, although much broken of late, was still an energetic woman ; and that very afternoon she went to that wing of the house which had been given up to her daughter-in-law's use.

The late Lord Shelvin had, in his latest will, assigned his wife the Hall as her place of residence during her son's minority, and there was no dower-house to which she could retire ! The present Lord Shelvin, therefore, on taking possession, had made a merit of insisting that she should still reside at the

Hall, his real object being to keep her under his own eye, as long as there was any fear of a child being brought forward as the real heir to the title he had taken.

The poor lady was, indeed, practically a prisoner. Her father, a cold, reserved man, with only one pleasure, that of fox-hunting, had been to see her since her lamentable flight and its consequences; and, on hearing her wild accusations and agonised protestations that she had not drowned her child, he had concurred with the rest in looking upon her as mentally deranged, and had acquiesced in her remaining at the Hall, in the care of her mother-in-law.

Forlorn, miserable, distracted by her cruel position, and by her agonised doubts as to the fate of her child, Lady Lilius, recognising that she was a prisoner, cared not what might happen to her.

She spent her days in alternate fits of passionate weeping, wild accusations, and frantic protests, and long hours of utter gloom and depression, when she would sit at one of the great square windows which peeped out of the thick ivy, and gaze vacantly out at the landscape which had once seemed to her so beautiful, but which she saw now through a deep veil of black despair.

This room where she passed most of her time was a long and narrow one, and was called the west saloon. It was in the very oldest part of the

house, and the groined stone roof had a cold, monastic look, which accorded well with the present use of the apartment.

It was indeed a very cell ; and Lady Liliás, sitting in sullen silence in the window, with her cheek resting on one hand, knew well that, although she could see no one, she was watched, as if she had been a dangerous maniac, from a gallery at one end, to which access could only be attained from the adjoining room.

On the occasion of Lady Shelvin's visit, Lady Liliás did not even turn her head to see who had entered. She still sat staring at the wintry fields, on which a thin sprinkling of snow was lying, at the cold silver-grey line of curving river, at the stretches of leafless trees, over which there hung a bluish haze.

"Liliás !" said Lady Shelvin.

She was touched, as she always was on entering this room, by the havoc which misery had made in the young widow's beauty. As she spoke, in a low, almost broken voice, she looked away.

"Liliás, I wish to speak to you."

Without a word in answer Lady Liliás rose. She did not look up, did not even turn her head towards the elder lady, but stood pale and motionless, like a prisoner before a hard judge.

Lady Shelvin found a great difficulty in beginning. After several tentative remarks, which Lady

Lilias received in silence, she said at last, rather impatiently—

“You are wrong to take this attitude towards me, Lilias. I am not unjust, or intentionally unkind to you. When you are quiet and reasonable, I am always ready to listen ; of course I cannot answer you when you are in a torrent of passion. Listen.”

Lady Lilias bent her head.

“I must rake up a painful subject——”

At last the younger lady looked up with a gleam of intelligence in her dimmed eyes.

“There is only one subject with me——” she said.

“And of course that is the one I mean. It is—the child.” Lady Lilias shivered, but said nothing.

“You know we all believe——. You know what we all believe, that the child, your boy, *our* boy—is dead.”

Lady Shelvin was talking slowly and deliberately, as if to force the sense of every word she uttered upon an enfeebled intelligence.

But Lady Lilias interrupted her, quite simply, quite quietly—

“You are all wrong, quite wrong,” she said.

“Well,” went on Lady Shelvin impatiently, “we have done our best to satisfy every doubt, as you know, by inserting the advertisement you wished in the papers—the advertisement you have yourself seen.”

"Well?"

But Lady Liliás had already guessed that something important was to come. There was a tinge of pink colour in her face as she sank down in her chair again and watched the elder lady with feverish eyes.

"Now don't get too much excited. But there has at last appeared a woman in answer to the advertisement; and I have persuaded Hugh to go up to town to bring her down here, with—with the child she alleges to be yours."

Her warning was unnecessary. Lady Liliás, instead of breaking out into passionate demonstrations, was overwhelmed, stunned by the news. It was some moments before the light which shone in her eyes began to look like that of hope. Then Lady Shelvin did her best to impress upon the poor young mother that she must be discriminating—not too eager.

"I think myself, and Mr. Ropley thinks," went on the old lady, "that the woman is an impostor, who has made up a story for the sake of getting the reward offered. And Hugh thought it a pity that I should mention this matter to you at all——"

At the mention of his name, Lady Liliás had shown signs of abhorrence and loathing. She interrupted her mother-in-law by saying quickly—

"He said so! He would——"

"But I insisted," Lady Shelvin went on hurriedly,

“that you should see this child yourself. It will be here to-morrow or the day after, no doubt. Nurse Waters shall be sent for, if you like, to give her opinion. And there is Emily——”

Lady Liliass interrupted by a discordant laugh—

“Nurse Waters ? I wouldn’t have her in the house ! After her pretending to recognise that poor drowned child”—and she shuddered—“as mine, as my beautiful boy ! And Emily ! What do I care for what she says ! There’s only one opinion—there can be only one opinion, and that is mine. I shall know my child, my own child !”

Lady Shelvin rose, with a troubled look upon her face, wishing that she had taken her nephew’s advice, not to mention the matter to Lady Liliass. It seemed only too clear that the poor lady, ready to snatch at any straw of hope, would acknowledge any infant brought before her as the one she had lost.

Lord Shelvin, on receiving the old lady’s decision to see the infant claimant, had at once left Drake’s Hall, with the ostensible object of going to town himself to bring the woman and child back with him.

CHAPTER XVIII

A CRUEL ORDEAL

IT was late on the following day when the viscount returned, accompanied by a neatly dressed, respectable-looking woman, who bore in her arms a young child. News of the ordeal that was in store for Lady Liliás had in some way leaked out, and by this time every one in the household knew that a boy, alleged to be the baby Lord Shelvin who was believed to have been drowned, had arrived at the Hall.

Old Lady Shelvin met her nephew with a troubled face.

“She has quite made up her mind, poor creature, that the child will prove to be her own. I wish now that I had taken your advice. She will insist that the child is hers, and if it should prove, on inquiries being made by the lawyers, that it is not her child, she will go mad altogether.”

“My dear aunt, I’m sorry for her, but she can’t possibly become more—more, well, mentally afflicted than she is already!” said Lord Shelvin, who smarted

under the wild accusations of his cousin's young widow, baseless as everybody but himself believed them to be. "You wished me to bring the child, and I have done so. And when the painful interview with Lady Liliás is over, you can, of course, put what questions you like to the woman who has brought him, and judge for yourself whether she has made out her case."

"And you, Hugh, you take it very quietly. But if she does prove it, you will become plain Hugh Garrington again. It will be rather hard upon you, will it not?"

"My dear aunt," replied the Viscount with fervour, "do you misjudge me so much as to think I would not willingly give up everything to bring the poor child to life again, if that could be done, and to restore the balance of that poor lady's mind? Indeed you do me injustice."

"I hope so, Hugh," replied Lady Shelvin, who had cooled a little towards her favourite nephew, now that his independent position allowed him to show rather more of his real character, of his selfishness, his profligacy, than she had acknowledged in him before.

All this time the baby had remained covered up in the arms of the woman who had brought him; and it was only at this point that the two were invited to come forward, for Lady Shelvin to see them.

The woman's pleasant, modest face attracted the old lady, who brought her without delay into the dining-room, and asked to see the baby.

"Hadn't we better take him straight to Lady Liliass?" asked Lord Shelvin, hurriedly. "She will have heard the carriage drive up, and will be impatient, I'm sure. Let us put her out of her suspense, aunt, before you begin to ask any questions."

As was to be expected in the circumstances, he was excited and uneasy. Lady Shelvin made allowance for his feelings, and smiled.

"You are right, Hugh. I will ask no questions," she said. "But I must have one peep, no more, at the child?"

The old lady was much more moved than she would have confessed to being. Although she had acquiesced in the conclusion all the rest of the household had come to, that Lady Liliass had drowned her child, and that the baby found in the river and buried, by her nephew's order, in the family vault, was the infant grandson she had loved so much, she had been almost as anxious as his own mother to catch at any straw of hope that some ghastly mistake might prove to have been made. Of foul play she had not the remotest suspicion.

She sank down in one of the heavy Cromwell chairs, by the long dining-table, and motioned to the woman to approach. As soon as the shawl was

taken off the child, his hat removed, and he induced to turn a shy and frightened face towards her, she uttered a low exclamation, and taking off her spectacles, rubbed them up with a trembling hand, replaced them, and held out her arms.

"Come, my little man, and let me look at you!" cried she in a tremulous voice. "Then, when she had passed a gentle hand through the boy's silky curls, and had at last coaxed a smile into his pretty little face, she said, in a low voice: "Hugh, your time is over! This is the child! How—how did he get away? Let me hear, let me hear the whole story!"

The frightened woman uttered an exclamation, and glanced at Lord Shelvin, who said quickly—

"Well, well, first let Lady Liliass see him. Let us see what she says!"

"She will say," said Lady Shelvin promptly, "that it is little Greville. He is just what he promised to be!"

"Come, then, let us take him upstairs. Let us hand him over to his mother."

Again the woman uttered a faint cry, and would have spoken, but she was cut short by the viscount, who told her to carry the baby out of the room.

Through the long hall they filed silently, first Lady Shelvin, leaning on her stick, and trembling so much that her nephew offered her his arm; and in

she rear the frightened woman, glancing around her as she went, at the dark panelled walls, at the frowning pictures of stately lords and ladies which she passed on the stairs, at the dim galleries and corridors opening out from the first landing, which bewildered her by their extent.

It seemed a long way to the West Saloon. They found Lady Liliás pacing up and down the long, dimly-lighted room, where a standing lamp at each end made only a little patch of light in its immediate vicinity, and left a long stretch of obscurity in between.

The young widow, in her long black robe, turned with a cry as the door opened, and, skimming across the intervening space like a hare, rushed up to the frightened woman, and tore the shawl from off the child she held.

They were all, she, the woman, the child, in one of the circles of light, and in the dimness just behind stood Lady Shelvin, leaning on her nephew's arm.

Lady Liliás did not see them. She saw no one but the child. Flinging herself on her knees, so that she could look up at the little fellow, panting, eager, with parted lips and staring eyes, she looked passionately in the baby's face, while her white hands, trembling and twitching, were held out towards it.

The next moment, however, the appalled listeners heard a low cry from her quivering lips, and she

sprang to her feet and staggered away, burying her face in her hands.

"Lilias, Lilias, don't you know him? Don't you recognise your child?" cried old Lady Shelvin, in agitated tones.

Lady Lilias turned fiercely.

"It is *not* my child!" said she hoarsely.

The viscount bent his head and whispered to Lady Shelvin to come away; but before she could do so, the woman who had brought the child burst out in a frightened voice—

"Oh, my lord, how could you play such a cruel trick? I never guessed what you wanted me for when you brought me here."

"Sh—sh! Hold your tongue," growled Lord Shelvin angrily, as he pulled her out of the room.

As they retreated—Lady Shelvin speechless with horror and indignation—they heard a sound which chilled them to the marrow. It was a long, shrill wail—the cry of a broken heart.

"Who is this child?" asked Lady Shelvin sharply.

"Oh, my lady, he's mine; I'm the wife of a stationer in Bristol; and when his lordship asked me to come, that the child might cheer her ladyship up a little, I never, never guessed, my lady."

"Hugh," cried Lady Shelvin, "how could you play such a heartless trick? Upon her, upon me!"

Lord Shelvin was furious. He had counted upon the eagerness of Lady Liliass to find her child, and had supposed she would acknowledge as hers the first beautiful boy who was offered to her. In that case, his triumph over her would have been complete.

"Look," he would have said, "she is not to be depended upon. She is mad."

Now, defeated and crestfallen, he tried in vain to make the best of what he felt to be an ugly business. He got rid of the woman and her child, and, seeing that it would be rash at that juncture to attempt to make his peace with his aunt, he disappeared into his study, to write to his trusty agents, Dowells and Snode.

Since Lady Liliass could reject a beautiful child which was not her own, there was an awful possibility that she might be equally discriminating if the real child should turn up; and that the real child was still in existence, in the charge of "the other woman," Lord Shelvin was entirely certain.

And, the "other woman" being evidently on the alert, it behoved him and his precious agents to be on the alert too,

CHAPTER XIX

A FRUITLESS ERRAND

WHILE Lord Shelvin was shut up by himself in his study, writing to summon his trusty agents, Dowells and Snode, to come and aid him by their advice, old Lady Shelvin, still incensed against her nephew for his heartless trick upon Lady Liliass, was writing an answer to the letter of Mr. Ropley.

She told him that Lady Liliass had seen one child, whom she had promptly declared not to be her son, although he had been introduced in a manner calculated to induce her to believe that he was ; and Lady Shelvin added that it seemed clear that Lady Liliass had recovered some of her powers of mind, and would be more discriminating than they had supposed. Lady Shelvin therefore begged Mr. Ropley to send down the woman and child who had come to him in answer to the advertisement, with as little delay as possible.

On the following day, the viscount took the earliest opportunity of making his peace with the

old lady, declaring that the artifice he had employed had, though apparently cruel, done good work, since it had ended by proving, without doubt, that Lady Liliass was not so mad as they had thought her.

This, of course, Lady Shelvin was bound to admit. And as her nephew professed to be delighted to hear of the letter she had written to Mr. Ropley, and to be as eager as she was to see the woman and the child who had answered the advertisement, the old lady ended by accepting his submission, and by forgiving him.

Two days afterwards Dowells and Snode arrived at the Hall in answer to the viscount's summons.

These two worthies, the former of whom was a solicitor who had been struck off the rolls, and the latter a young man of good family but bad character, who brought his own native rascality to the aid of his partner's law, had, by degrees, grown so necessary to Lord Shelvin, by borrowing money for him, and by settling those blackmailing attacks to which men of his character are always exposed, that their visits were of common occurrence.

On this occasion they found their client in an unusual state of excitement.

"I've sent for you," he began at once, "on a wretched business. The child—the real child, I believe, has turned up, as I always said it would. That confounded advertisement Lady Liliass insisted on putting in the papers has done its work."

"But," said Snode, whose whitey-brown skin looked more unwholesome than usual on hearing this aspersion cast upon his own testimony, "I saw the child thrown in the riv——"

"You saw *a* child thrown into the river, perhaps," interrupted his client, who made no scruple of insulting his agents when he was angry; "but you know I have always felt sure that we hadn't got to the bottom of that business; and now a woman has called at Ropley's office with a child, which she says she stole from Sweech's house that night."

"Any witnesses? It would take a lot of proving," suggested Snode.

"It will be proved in the long run, I've no doubt," said Lord Shelvin irritably. "The mother, in the first place, is more dangerous than we thought. She rejected at once a pretty child I had brought here yesterday to try her. Ten to one she'd find out something—some trumpery little thing only a fool would remember—that would settle the question, and put the baby in, and me out."

"That can't be allowed!" said Dowells decidedly. Their client was a much more valuable one to them now that he was Viscount Shelvin than he had been as plain Captain Garrington; so there was a ring of heartiest sincerity in his voice. "Let us go and see her for you, my lord—see the woman. Perhaps we could frighten her."

"She's too 'cute,'" said the Viscount, regretfully.

"She has been twice to Ropley's, but refuses to give him her address; and now he has written to old Lady Shelvin, and she wants the brat brought here. What's to be done?"

"Perhaps she won't dare to bring him, when it comes to the point," said Dowells. "There's something in the background, for her to refuse to give her address."

"She's an impostor, Lord Shelvin, I'll swear," said Snode.

But the viscount was not to be persuaded.

"I shall hunt up that woman Sweech again," said he. "She is more likely than any one else to be able to find out who the woman is; and disappointed greed will make her sharp-sighted. She will not have got over the loss of the reward we offered her for the recovery of the child that night."

Dowells shifted about uneasily and put on a half-offended air.

"I hope you don't suppose, my lord," said he breathing rather more heavily as he spoke, "that that miserable old woman would be more likely to pull you through—I mean to solve your doubts in the matter than—h'm—than Mr. Snode and myself. Believe me, people of that sort are dangerous folk to have to deal with. The woman drinks, for one thing, that's certain; and there's no knowing what she might let out while she was under the influence of liquor."

"There's nothing she could let out that would do anybody any harm," said Snode quickly. "I maintain that you are troubling yourself unnecessarily, Lord Shelvin. All you have to do is to be on the look-out for anything fresh that comes to hand ; and, believe me, the chances are ten to one against your ever hearing of this spurious child again."

"I entirely agree with Mr. Snode," said Dowells, who seemed to be, as time went on, increasingly dependent upon his younger partner for his opinions.

"Play a waiting game," went on Snode.

"Now I would rather have the child here, spurious or not, and get it over," said the Viscount between his set teeth.

Snode shook his head warningly.

"It would make things difficult for us," said he cautiously, "if a child were to be acknowledged by the mother. My advice is : don't have the woman and child here, if you can by any means prevent it. If you hear of their coming, have them—h'm—intercepted. Remember, the longer it is before the child makes a formal appearance here, the more difficult it will be for its friends to establish a claim."

•This advice, and the warning tone in which it was uttered, made sufficient impression upon Lord Shelvin to deter him from doing as he had at first intended, and going up to London to try to see the woman and child himself. After all, the infant claimant might not be a genuine one ; and although

the viscount had the gravest doubts on that subject, it was undoubtedly true that delay in presenting the claim would injure the chances of the child.

However, before the departure of Dowells and Snode, he had made up his mind to enlist the services of old Mother Sweech, and to set her on the watch for the return to Bristol of the mysterious "other woman," who was, he was convinced, implicated in the affair.

It so happened that Lady Liliás, from her window in the West Saloon, caught sight of the two agents as they took a short cut across the park to the cab they had waiting at the bottom. Their visits were always very unostentatiously paid, as Lady Shelvin, lynx-eyed old lady that she was, had conceived a strong dislike of the pair, and had openly expressed her opinion to her nephew that "they did not look like the sort of lawyers for a man of his position."

This was the first time Lady Liliás had seen anything of the pair since that memorable day when she had overheard their conversation with the then Captain Garrington, and had caught sight of the men themselves afterwards as they passed through the hall.

On the instant she divined that their presence in the neighbourhood was connected with the disappearance of her son; and the sight of them, the tall, lean, stooping figure, with the lounging walk, and the short, fat, pursy man who waddled along

beside him, threw her into one of those paroxysms of impotent rage and despair which had given them all reason to suppose that grief had turned her brain.

In the meantime Mary Gold, in her London lodging, was preparing for the next step in her endeavour to establish the identity of "her" boy. Since Jack Mallory had told her of Lady Liliass's suspicions and fears, and that it was mistrust of her late husband's nephew which had driven her forth on that eventful October afternoon, Mary had become possessed by the same fears. Surely, she argued, if the mother had not considered her child safe before, when his cousin was only a visitor at the Hall, how much greater would the danger be, now that that cousin was master there ?

So she resolved not to go again to the lawyer's until she had made an attempt in a fresh direction.

Surely the father of Lady Liliass, distressed as he must be on account of his daughter's state, would lend at least a patient ear to any one who could offer a solution to the terrible mystery which was wrecking the poor lady's life !

She started, therefore, one bright January morning for Norfolk, and reached Gillingham Towers, which was within two miles of a station, quite early in the day.

The aspect of the mansion struck Mary with even more awe than had that of Drake's Hall.

Gillingham Towers had none of the quaint, old-world beauty, the homely charm of that house ; but its long façade, with its tall pillars, its balustrades, its broad flights of wide steps, and its position in the very heart of an extensive park, where the deer were quietly feeding, struck her with admiration. So that she looked at the baby in a puzzled way, as she whispered into his innocent ears—

“ Oh, baby, will the grand people you belong to ever take you back from the poor little home you have now ? ”

They had let her through at the lodge-gates, satisfied with her nice appearance and with her statement that she had business of importance with the earl. The lodge-keeper had hesitated a moment ; had looked askance at the baby ; but had finally given her admission.

Mary stopped a moment when she got near to the house, with her heart in her mouth. She hardly liked to venture up those wide steps, and present herself, with her tiny burden, at the great door under the colonnade. But then she remembered, with a flushing cheek, that it was not humble Mary Gold who was calling on the earl ; it was his grandson, Greville Garrington, Lord Shelvin.

And as she thought that she looked down at the poor little helpless, eight months' old child, who was smiling in her arms, and burst into tears.

As she lingered at the foot of the steps, hastily

drying her eyes, with the knowledge that any appearance of distress might destroy all her chance of seeing the earl, she heard the sound of a horse's hoofs behind her on the broad gravel drive. Looking round quickly, wondering whether the rider might be the earl himself, she saw a gentleman, in riding-dress, in the act of dismounting. He met her glance with some curiosity, but with kindness also. And Mary, struck with the amiable expression of his handsome face, wondered vaguely whether she dared try to enlist his sympathies on her behalf.

He, on his side, seemed to be interested in the appearance of these two figures ; and as he came up, leading his horse, he looked at the baby, and gave it a nod and a smile.

This simple action decided Mary.

"Oh, sir——," she began.

And then, blushing deeply, and not knowing how to go on, she stopped.

The gentleman, who was slender, fair-haired, grey-eyed, and who looked about three or four-and-twenty, checked his horse at once.

"Well ?" said he.

He was evidently about to say something more ; but he checked himself, puzzled by the meeting.

"Do you know if—if Lord Gillingham, the father of Lady Lilius," she began, when she was checked by her surprise at the effect of the lady's name on the man before her.

"Lady Liliass!" he echoed, in a changed voice.
"Do you come from her?"

Quick as are most women in scenting out a love-history, Mary guessed at once that the name had a tender interest for him.

By an inspiration, Mary knew that she might speak out safely to him.

"This is her son," said she simply.

Over the young man's gentle face there passed another change—a look of incredulity, passing swiftly into one of yearning hope. Then he looked at the child, and from the child to the woman.

"Do you mean that?" he asked in a tremulous voice.

"I do, sir. He was lost, as you have perhaps heard. And now the question is whether I can get his friends to acknowledge him."

"Has—has Lady Liliass seen him?"

"No. Perhaps you know, sir, that there are difficulties in the way. They don't let anybody see her; they say she is mad. But I don't believe she is mad enough not to know her own child!"

The gentleman listened to her with deep attention, looking at the child as he did so.

"And you have brought him here—to see Lord Gillingham?"

"I'm going to try. Oh, sir, would you——"

"Help you to get an interview? Indeed I will!"

But I'm afraid you will find as much difficulty here as at Drake's Hall, for different reasons."

Mary sighed.

"Sir, I can but try, and spend my life in trying," said she doggedly.

"Come up with me," said he, as at that moment a man-servant, who had perceived the group, came out to take his horse from him. "We must see what we can do."

Naturally enough, this ready belief, this kindly word, gave Mary fresh hopes. And when, after waiting a few minutes in the wide hall of the mansion, she was conducted into one of a long suite of lofty drawing-rooms, handsome, cold-looking, which had the air of being rarely used, her spirits rose high.

But they were doomed to disappointment.

When she had sat for a few minutes on one of the gilt-legged Louis Quinze chairs, looking up at the painted ceilings, and soothing the baby, who showed an unpromising objection to the splendours to which his birth entitled him, a door a long way off opened, and a middle-aged gentleman, not very tall and not very dignified, whom Mary could scarcely believe to be such a great person as an earl, came up to her and looked at her coldly.

"Mr. Wilmer says you have come with some story about a baby," was his very unpromising opening.

In as few words as possible Mary gave him an outline of her tale. To do him justice Lord Gillingham listened very attentively, and looked carefully at the child.

"It's a very strange story," said he at last. And he brought his face near enough to the baby for Mary to note every detail of his cold, determined face, his keen light blue eyes, his scanty grey whiskers cut close and well-trimmed. "It is not for me to say it may not be true. But on the face of it, it seems to me improbable, and I must tell you frankly that I should not presume to take any strong step in such a matter without the advice of a lawyer. I think you admit that Mr. Ropley was not encouraging?"

Reluctantly, Mary did admit it.

"But," she pleaded, "he promised to write to Lady Shelvin."

"And it is, then, to her you must look in the matter. I could not presume to take a side in the affair, knowing so little as I do about it. The matter must be settled at Drake's Hall, which is now my daughter's home."

"Prison!" said Mary, in a low voice.

"Ah!" cried Lord Gillingham sharply, and over his face there passed a shadow of pain which showed her he was not without feeling, "I can't discuss that matter."

"And if the house was not safe for the child

before, how much less safe is it now?" went on Mary, boldly.

But the earl's face grew cold again.

"I see," said he, "you have primed yourself with all the tales, all the illusions of the servants' hall. The child would be perfectly safe there if he were proved to be the late Lord Shelvin's son. We are not in the Middle Ages!"

"There are bad men about now, your lordship, just as there were then!" retorted Mary with spirit.

"Perhaps."

Lord Gillingham had grown dry, and his interest was waxing cooler. He walked away from her, and put his hand on the bell.

"You must excuse me," he said. "My time is valuable, as, I have no doubt, yours is also. Good morning."

"Good morning."

Mary could hardly utter the words as, with tears rising in her eyes and a lump in her throat, she took the baby out of the room, following the servant who now ushered her out.

To think that her boy should be driven out thus from his grandfather's house! Mary felt that she could have screamed the words out, in her rage and despair, as she hugged her baby to her breast, and carried him through the broad corridor, with its soft red carpet under foot and the bright outlook through many windows on to a wide terrace outside.

She had hardly stumbled down the steps, for she could scarcely see, when she heard a footstep behind her. The next moment she saw beside her the gentleman who had taken her into the house.

"I was afraid," said he, gently, "that you would find him a hard nut to crack. But look here, you mustn't give up. If your story is true, and I should like to believe it," he added heartily, yet not without the reserving doubt of common sense, "you must get justice for the child in the long run. Look here, I don't want to be impertinent, but Lady Lilius and I were playfellows. There isn't anything I wouldn't do to hear of her being herself, her old happy self again." His tone grew touchingly tender as he went on: "And—and if you would let me help in any way—if there is *any* way by which I could be of use, I would do what I could gladly."

Mary, whose tears his kind words had checked, looked with a blush, but with grateful eyes, into his handsome face.

She knew he wanted to offer her money, and that he did not like to do so in so many words.

"Thank you, thank you very much," she said simply. "You have done me good, and what is good to me is good to *him*," she went on, as she looked down tenderly at the child; "but I cannot take any other help than kind words and encouragement from any but the members of his family, and from them only as his right," she added proudly.

"Very well. Take this, then ; and remember that, if you should think you would like more encouragement to persevere in your work, you are to write to me. Goodbye."

He held out his hand to her, and he kissed the child. Then he went back for his horse, and Mary, soothed by this unexpected meeting, and cheered into renewed energy, went down the drive, murmuring—

"My boy, my boy ! They shall receive you better some day !"

Then presently she looked at the card the gentleman had given her, and she saw that it bore the name of "Geoffrey Wilmer, The Monks' Barn, Gillingham."

Poor Lady Liliass ! Mary could only guess at the little romance which lay here ; but yet it was easy reading. If she had married this lover of her own generation, she would have been a happy wife yet.

Mary went sorrowfully back to London as the clouds gathered at the close of the day. There was one consolation through it all—her baby was her baby still !

CHAPTER XX

THE MOTHER'S DECISION

IT was a few days after her visit to Gillingham when, one evening, just as it was growing dusk and the glow of the fire was getting bright, Mary heard Tippetts' well-known knock at her sitting-room door.

The baby was asleep in his cot by the fire, and Mary was moving softly about the room, setting the table for tea. This was her favourite hour of all the day, when baby would wake up from his nap, and signify to her by a little cooing noise that he was ready for his five o'clock meal. As Tippetts often looked in at this time, when he had made himself tidy after his day's work, Mary, on this occasion, was not surprised, but called out, "Come in," with a smile of welcome ready on her face.

When he opened the door, however, he did not come in, as usual, but stood outside, with only his head in sight, nodding and winking at her with great vigour.

Mary paused, with the butter-dish in her hand.

"Why, what's the matter, Tippetts?" asked she.

He nodded more violently than ever, and came a little further in.

"There's somebody coming. He's half way up the stairs, and he don't like to come no further without you arst him—some one you won't be sorry for to see, I think, and some one as"—and Tippetts grew more roguish, more sly than ever—"as won't be sorry for to see you, I'll swear!"

Mary reddened. She guessed that he meant Jack Mallory, and her heart began to beat very fast. The young gamekeeper was indeed the person in all the world, next to the precious baby, whose presence gave her the greatest pleasure, although she hardly acknowledged to herself how deep the interest was which his handsome, honest face, his kindness and his loyalty, had aroused within her.

"Is it Mr. Mallory?" she asked simply, as she turned away her head to hide her blushing face.

"Of course it is!" answered Tippetts lustily, as he made way for Jack, who was by this time behind him.

"May I come in, Miss Gold?" asked the manly, pleasant voice which sounded so comforting to Mary's ear.

* "I'm very glad to see you," said Mary, smiling a welcome which was all the sweeter for being rather shy. "And I hope you've brought some good news?"

He held her hand for a moment in his before he let it go, and as he did so he smiled down into her face in a manner which made her blush again.

It was just a second or two before he answered, and when he did so it was in a rather lower, deeper voice, a voice which sent through her a strange thrill.

"I hope so, Miss Gold. But—we will talk about that presently."

And Tippetts, who was now in the background, was heard to chuckle to himself.

Mary, rather astonished and almost confused by the manner of his greeting, invited him to sit at the table, while Tippetts finished the preparations for tea himself, and Mary took up the baby.

"Well," she said tremulously, as she brought her darling over to be admired, and was delighted to see that, in his baby way, he seemed to recognise Jack as a friend, "and what is the news? I can't wait. Have you heard anything more from the Hall?"

"Why, yes," said Jack.

And he proceeded, to the breathless horror of Mary and Tippetts, to relate the trick which had been played on Lady Lilius, and the triumphant manner in which she had come through the ordeal.

When he ended, Mary was sobbing.

"Now," said she with determination, "doesn't that prove the poor lady will know her own? Oh, Mr. Mallory, the time is nearer than I thought for

my boy to come into his own ! If Lady Liliás will only see him, only recognise him, I will take him away, out of the reach of these people she's afraid of, to her own friends, where he will be safe, and where she can join him and be happy with him ! ”

As she sobbed out these words, Mary clung to the child, as if she already felt the pangs of parting with her darling.

Jack was gentle, but grave, as he answered—

“ It will be hard work to get speech with her, for they keep her shut up close, poor lady. But I'll manage it, if I die for it ! ”

There was a pause. Mary gave him a grateful look, while she dried her eyes, but the look he gave her in return set her blushing once more.

They had a merry meal, all three of the grown-up people giving their attention to the baby, who appeared to appreciate the homage they offered, and to enjoy himself as much as any one. When tea was over, Tippetts disappeared with some abruptness, rather to the dismay of Mary, who noticed that he gave Jack a significant wink as he bade him farewell. Mary rose from her chair, and was about to follow Tippetts out of the room, to inquire what work it was which took him off so suddenly, when Jack's voice stopped her.

“ Let him go, Miss Gold, please,” said he. “ I— I have something to say to you ; and I daresay he guessed.”

Mary returned with trembling limbs and a white face. Jack, however, gave her no time for protests.

"I won't deny," he said, as he stood up by the little fireplace, looking gigantic in the tiny room, "that I told him something which helped him a little. Miss Gold, I'm going to surprise you, to frighten you a little, I'm afraid. I'm going to ask you what I've never asked a woman before—I'm going to ask you to be my wife."

Mary gave a little gasp. The next moment, recovering herself, she laughed, not bitterly or scornfully or disagreeably, but with a little touch of pleasant irony.

"Oh, no, no ; you are joking. A man doesn't ask a woman to marry him when he has only known her a little while, and when he knows—such things about her as—as—you know—you must know about me !"

"It's what I know about you makes me want to marry you," retorted Jack, in a full, firm, manly voice. "It's because I've had such a chance of knowing what your heart is like, as few men get of knowing about the women they decide to marry. And that's enough for me, Miss Gold, as it would be enough for any man who's got the makings of a man in him !"

"But—you remember——"

"I remember a despairing woman, full of noble pity and love and self-sacrifice, even then—a woman

whom love and pity and self-sacrifice have raised above the level of any woman I've ever met. That's what I remember, Miss Gold, and it's enough to make me feel for you what I never felt for any woman before."

Mary was weeping quietly, sitting by the fire, with her loved child in her arms.

"Miss Gold," said he, and as he uttered them the words were a caress, and he came close to her, and ventured to touch her shoulder and the baby's little hand together, "if you are to give up the young master, you'll want some one to comfort you, won't you?"

But for answer Mary only shook her head.

"Oh, but I know better," persisted Jack, firmly and good-humouredly, in the tone of a man who will take no denial. "I know it will go nigh to breaking your heart, as it would go nigh to breaking mine to lose sight of you. And where in this world would you care so well to live as within sight of the young master's own place, where you could know always how he was, and see him when you liked?"

Mary trembled, but she was firm in her turn. Presently she stood up and faced him resolutely, though with red eyes and shaking limbs.

"You've given me more happiness than I ever thought I should have in my life again," she said very quietly, and without looking at him. "You've done me a thousand times more honour

than I deserve. But I won't listen to you ; I won't answer you. Before I listen to anything else in the world, I must think of my baby, I must know what is to become of him."

"And do you think, if you couldn't get them to receive him, I shouldn't be glad and proud——"

"Hush !" said Mary, holding up her hand. "There is more to settle than you think. There is perhaps more difficulty than we either of us know of in the way. Don't say another word to me, not one other word, till you have spoken with Lady Liliass, and let me know what she says."

But with all the severity, all the mock primness she tried to assume, there was in her eyes a touching gladness, the glow of a most glorious surprise, which gave him a thrill of satisfaction and of hope as he looked at her.

She was firm in her decision ; she would not let him utter one more word of direct persuasion or entreaty. But yet there was, in his manner to her, as long as he remained by her side, and after the return of Tippetts from his alleged work, just a pleasant touch of the air of a lover, which Mary could neither resent nor define, and which, it may be believed, she found not unwelcome.

And when he left his last words were a repetition of his promise to obtain an interview with Lady Liliass without delay.

Jack kept his word. On the following day he was

back again at Drake's Hall, and finding that Lord Shelvin was out hunting, he thought it was a good opportunity of fulfilling his promise to Mary.

So, daring the watch which he knew was always kept on the poor imprisoned lady and her movements, he presented himself below the windows of the West Saloon in the early afternoon, after climbing the high fence which had lately been put up round this part of the grounds with the unavowed purpose of making her isolation the more complete.

As he could not at first see the lady at any of the windows, Jack had to walk up and down on the terrace below, expecting every moment to be ordered off by one of the vigilant custodians in whose charge she had been put. For Lord Shelvin, foreseeing that Jack, whom he disliked and suspected, might make some attempt of this sort, had appointed members of the household to mount guard over the alleged mad lady night and day.

Luckily for Jack, however, she had been left for so long unmolested that the servants had begun to relax their vigilance a little, and there appeared to be no one about on this particular occasion.

To his great relief, the gamekeeper presently saw the lady herself appear at one of the windows and gaze mournfully out. But was it she? Was that thin, grey face the countenance of the lily-white lady of whose delicate beauty the late Lord Shelvin had been so proud?

Jack's heart smote him as he looked at the sharpened outlines of the still lovely face, at the great eyes, which looked larger than ever in their listless mournfulness, and he thanked Heaven that he was going to bring her a message which would be like the opening of the gates of paradise to the poor, weary heart. For, as he looked, the conviction was borne in upon him that she was not mad, as they pretended; that she was only broken-hearted and despairing.

The next moment he had attracted her attention, and he was touched to see the look of pleasure which passed swiftly across her wan face, and the slight flush which came into her ghastly cheeks.

He made a sign to her that he wanted to speak to her, and the next moment, after a hurried look round, she had unfastened one of the little French windows which had been fixed into the heavy mullioned frames, and beckoned him to come as near as he could.

There was a great bed of rhododendrons and other bushes under the window. But in a moment Jack had dashed through these and had found a footing in the ivy, which grew thick and strong upon the side wall of the house.

"Oh, Mallory, Mallory, how beautiful it is to me to see the face of a friend, a real friend," cried the poor lady, in a broken whisper, as she held out one of her soft, thin, white hands to grasp his hard,

strong fingers. "Why haven't you been to see me before?"

"It hasn't been so easy, my lady," said Jack, whose eyes were full of tears. "And I should hardly have dared to risk it now but for something I've got to say to you. Something important, my lady. Do you think you can bear to hear it?"

"Anything, anything, Mallory. I've gone through so much, I've borne so much already, that there's nothing I'm not prepared for now!"

"Ay, but it's joyful news; nothing sad this time," said Jack very gently. "Nothing but what it will do your heart good to hear."

Then over her face as she looked at him there came a strange change. It was as if the dead soul of joy and happiness came slowly to life again within her. She kept her great blue eyes steadily fixed upon his face, while her lips parted in a smile, the first smile of happiness which her face had worn since the loss of her baby son.

"Oh, Mallory," she whispered at last, "I can trust *you*! You would not play tricks with me; you would not wake my hopes to break them again, I know!" Her face flashed out into vivacity, into life. "You have found him?"

"Heaven be praised that I can bring you such news!" cried Jack, who was choking, and almost inaudible from the excess of his joy. "Yes, my

lady, I've found the young master. He's safe and sound and well."

For a moment he shuddered, alarmed for her sanity, fearing the good news had been too much for her. For she threw back her pretty head and clapped her hands with a happy little laugh.

But the next moment, recovering herself on seeing the look of dismay on his honest face, she bent down towards him and shook her head gently.

"Don't be afraid, Mallory. It isn't true that joy kills ! It's misery, only misery that does that ! Tell me, tell me where he is ?" And her voice sank lower and lower, and she put up her finger to warn him to speak low also.

"He's in the care of a good woman, my lady, the woman I want to make my wife," answered he simply.

She clasped her hands together, while the tears trickled down her cheeks. And he turned his head away, for he saw that she was occupied in prayer and thanksgiving to Heaven for its goodness towards her.

When he heard her move again, and dared to look up, he saw that her face wore an altered look ; there was a sparkle in her eyes, and colour in her cheeks.

"When do you want him brought here, my lady ?" whispered he.

But she shuddered with alarm.

"He is not to be brought here," she answered quickly. "It is not to be known that he is alive!"

"My lady!" cried Jack, in amazement. "Where will you see him then?"

"I won't see him at all — yet," answered she promptly. "Shall I put my darling child into the danger he's escaped? No. He's safe. I trust you. You must watch over him. Remember — if it's known that he is alive, by his father's will he must remain here, in this house. Now as long as old Lady Shelvin is alive, and mistress here, Captain Garrington and his vile agents" — and she shivered — "will have access to the place, and will have a voice in everything. Don't you see, Mallory, that my boy's only chance is in remaining out of the world — till he can be brought here — safely?"

Jack was amazed. He hardly dared to believe his ears. But, knowing how deep and strong her love for her son was, he had to acquiesce in her wishes, the more so that she had already proved her suspicions to be true, although she could gain no credence except from himself for her story.

"Now go," said she, making him a sign to retire. "Don't let any one see you as you go back. And Heaven bless you for your message."

"Won't you let me tell you where the child is, my lady?"

But she put her hands to her ears.

“No, I will not hear. I am surrounded by spies. I might betray myself in my sleep!” cried Lady Liliast. “But I am happy now, quite happy. And even that fact will betray me to their sharp eyes and ears. God bless you, Jack Mallory!”

And with a radiant smile of happy gratitude, though the tears the struggle cost her still rained down her face, she closed the window and motioned him away.

CHAPTER XXI

MARY'S SACRIFICE

JACK MALLORY started when he perceived, on getting over the fence which now surrounded this part of the garden, that some one was watching him, some one so near that his words with Lady Liliás might have been overheard.

For he perceived glimpses of a woman's skirt behind a bush near one of the back entrances of the mansion; and although she disappeared into the house too quickly for him to learn that it was his sister Hannah who was watching him, he began to feel thankful that he had not mentioned the whereabouts of the young master.

Hannah had followed him from the cottage, full of curiosity concerning his visits to London, had seen her brother climb up the ivy to the window, and had caught enough of the tale to be able to report to Lord Shelvin that evening that Jack had told Lady Liliás something which had delighted her greatly.

And the viscount, with an oath, guessed what sort of news this must be.

The next time Jack went to London, which was very shortly after this scene with Lady Lillas, he took care to go without asking leave, for fear he should be followed.

It was about the same time in the afternoon as on the previous visit that he went up the stairs to Mary's little sitting-room. She recognised the step, and her heart beat fast at the sound.

"Come in!" cried she softly, in answer to his knock.

And the moment he entered she saw that he had important news for her. When he told her the story of his interview, she listened with clasped hands, and with a look of exaltation on her face such as one can imagine that an angel might wear. .

She did not weep this time.

"She trusts me!" she murmured softly. "His own mother trusts me. And I will be worthy of the trust."

"Of course you will, Mary," said Jack, not noticing that he had used the Christian name by which he thought of her to himself. "And now won't you give me a different answer to the one I had from you the other day? Won't you let me help you to take care of the child we both love?"

For a few moments there was a terrible struggle in her heart. She knew she could love this brave,

gentle, handsome fellow ; knew she could be happy with him, happier than she had ever dreamed that she could be. But, on the other hand, she saw the dangers to which the child would be exposed if she were to take him into the neighbourhood of Drake's Hall—she saw, too, how other interests, other duties might arise to divide her care and her time with the charge she had taken upon herself.

Thrusting the temptation away, therefore, with a great effort, she turned to him and said simply—

“I can't. I would if I could, if it were safe or right. But it's not. Don't ask me why. Think it out and you will know. You must go back ; you must go away. You mustn't come up here again. Respect the lady's wishes. She said he must be lost to the world till she was free. You must stay at Drake's Hall, on the watch. And you must not write to me until she tells you to. And I must not write to you unless, for the child's sake, there is dire need. Goodbye, goodbye !”

This farewell seemed abrupt, harsh. But Jack knew that it seemed so only because her heart felt nigh to breaking. With one long look from eye to eye, one pressure of the hand, one pressure of the woman's hands by the man's honest lips, they parted.

Kind-hearted Tippetts, coming round the corner of the street, caught sight of the retreating figure of

Jack Mallory, and came upstairs two steps at a time, full of congratulations.

But when he came into the little room he found Mary crouched by the fire, with the sleeping infant in her arms, her head bent, her whole attitude expressive of some deep, fierce sorrow.

"Hallo, Mary!" cried he, in as soft a voice as a woman's, "not been having a row with yer sweetheart, eh? I know he is yer sweetheart, for he told me so."

Mary raised her face, which was sorrowful, but quite sweet, quite calm.

"Sweetheart!" cried she gently. "I've had no quarrel with my sweetheart, Tippets. Here he is."

And she printed a passionate kiss on the sleeping face of the child.

"And is that all the sweetheart yer mean to 'ave, Polly?" asked Tippets, with a disconsolate face.

"Yes, he's going to fill every corner of my heart, and leave no room for any one else," said she, quietly.

And Tippets shook his head, and heaved a sigh of disappointment; but he said nothing, for Mary had a way of meaning what she said.

But he was sorry for Jack Mallory, and sorry for Mary too.

CHAPTER XXII

AFTER SEVEN YEARS

FOR the first few months after Jack Mallory's last visit to Mary Gold in her London lodging, she was always on the alert, expecting to hear from him that there was now a chance of her bringing the baby in safety to Drake's Hall.

Now that the heart of Lady Liliás was relieved of its burden of suspense and dread on account of her lost child, it was only natural to suppose that before long her mind would altogether recover its tone, and that she would end by devising some plan of receiving him back to his home, and of establishing his claim.

But Mary reckoned without knowing all the circumstances ; she did not understand the weakness, the timidity, the excessive dread of the people among whom her fate had cast her, which had blighted the young widow's life. It was inconceivable to Mary, who had energy as well as devotion, that a mother should be content to pass month after month with-

out a sight of the son she had adored. Fear would never have worked such havoc with Mary, whose strength and weakness lay in different directions. Despair had broken Mary's spirit for a time, but when once she had an object to live for again, all her faculties woke up into active life ; all her energy, her powers of mind and of heart, were at once re-established in more than their old vigour.

But when month after month passed, until a whole year had slipped away, Mary, not unnaturally, became so much alarmed, so much perplexed, that she could not resist the temptation of writing a short letter to Jack Mallory, asking him if all was well at Drake's Hall, and whether there was any news of Lady Lilius and her intentions.

Mary took care to put no address on the letter, and not to mention the child ; and, knowing how much there was to fear from the spying habits of Jack's sister, whose object she was able to guess better than Jack himself could, she took the further precaution of taking it a little way out of town to post.

The answer came quickly, but was not reassuring. Mary could not repress a feeling of strong excitement when she first got the letter from the man who would have made her his wife, but on opening it she found more than one disappointment awaiting her. Jack's tone was cold and formal ; and although he was only following her own lead, she was woman

enough to shed tears over the fact. And the news he gave was discouraging.

Lady Liliast, he said, had so far recovered that she now went out a good deal, always on horseback, and no longer lived in seclusion. And she would sometimes speak to him, and ask him whether the child was well ; but at any question as to her intentions she would always draw back, and say they must wait—wait.

So that Jack acknowledged that he saw little hope of any immediate change in the position of affairs.

Another year passed before Mary wrote again, and the answer Jack sent was, if possible, more discouraging than ever. Lady Liliast asked less often than at first about her child, and seemed constrained and uneasy as she put the simple question, which Jack always answered by saying that the child was certainly well as long as he heard nothing to the contrary.

By this time Mary had become resigned to waiting, although she never gave up hope ; and it became the regular thing with her to write to Jack Mallory at the beginning of each new year, and to receive his short, formal note in return.

She never lost the feeling of excitement which the receipt of Jack's curt letters gave her ; never failed to be disappointed at the wording of them. They were the merest formal notes, nothing more.

Of course, she thought, he was ashamed of his

passing fancy, and was no longer interested in her except as the guardian of his old master's son ; and, although she always told herself that this was quite natural and right, she never failed to feel a pang when she had folded the last letter up, and shut it in with her few treasures : the baby's little shirt, with the coronet in the corner ; a lock of his first crop of downy hair ; and the rest of the baby clothes he had had on when she found him in Mrs. Sweech's scullery.

Meanwhile the boy thrived, and grew from year to year stronger, handsomer, more engaging. It may have been a consequence only of the great care she took with him, of the strength of her own feeling influencing her manner ; but certain it is that the child seemed from the first to be superior to his surroundings. She dressed him carefully, trained him well, watched over him night and day ; and as she called him from the first by his name of Greville Garrington, and made no pretence of his being her own child, representing always that she was his nurse and guardian only, she established a valuable chain of evidence for the future time when, as she supposed, she might have to bring witnesses to prove how long he had been known by that name.

The vicar of the church she attended she trusted a little farther than this. While acknowledging that there were circumstances in his history which she would rather not be called upon to explain, she told

him something of the difficulty she was in as to his education, as he would possibly come into a great position by and by, and she asked his advice on the subject.

The Reverend John Wace was not only a good man, but a sensible one, and, after taking time to think over as much of the case as she would tell him, he advised her to send the boy to the Board School, allowing him to keep his own name, but not obtruding any of the facts of his history upon him or his companions.

"You won't get him better grounded anywhere," said he. "He is happy in his home influence, I'm sure, and to mix with boys of a different class to that which you believe he may some day belong to does a boy good, and not harm."

So, having taught him herself until he was six years old, Mary from that time took him regularly to school every day, fetching him away herself without fail, at first to the derision of the bigger children, who soon, however, took her attentions to her precious charge as a matter of course.

For there was nothing of the "molly-coddle" about little Greville. He was hot-tempered and passionate, but although his high spirit got him into "rows," his "pluck" got him out again, and he made more friends than enemies.

Mary never concealed from him, when he was old enough to understand the fact, that his friends were

in a higher position than he was ; and she impressed upon him that he must take especial pains to do right and to behave well, so that he might be ready for any position in which he might some day be placed.

The child took it all in quite simply, and only stipulated that, if his other friends took him away from London, Mary should go too.

The boy adored her ; the sight of a shadow of pain across her face would subdue him to gentleness and contrition in the midst of a passionate outbreak. She was to him everything—mother, mistress, nurse, guardian, teacher, friend.

He and Mary had one terrific battle on his account, when a philanthropic lady who kept a home of orphan boys, struck by the child's bright face and pretty head of curly brown hair, wanted to take charge of him, and to bring him up in her institution.

She went to the vicar about it, and was much annoyed by his suggestion that there were difficulties in the way.

"I don't know whether he is an orphan, for one thing," said he. "There's a mystery about him. I believe the child is of good birth. So the young lady who has charge of him says."

"Young lady !"

"I can't call her anything else. She is a most refined, ladylike woman, although she only occupies a subordinate position at one of the theatres."

"Theatres!" Mrs. Croil shuddered. "Surely it would be better for the boy to be taken away from such a pernicious influence?"

"Do you think it pernicious? You would hardly say so if you knew Miss Gold."

"When can I see her?" asked Mrs. Croil, rather icily. "If she is really so fond of the child she won't stand in the way of my offer."

The vicar explained that Miss Gold always met the boy as he came out of school, and suggested, though not hopefully, that she might waylay them both on one of these occasions.

Mrs. Croil availed herself of the suggestion, and got the vicar himself to accompany her, to point out Miss Gold, and to perform the ceremony of introduction.

"Miss Gold," cried the Vicar, as soon as the clock struck, and Mary came up to the board school gates, "here is a lady, Mrs. Croil, who is very much interested in your little charge, Greville Garrington, and who wishes to speak to you about him."

Poor Mary trembled and grew pale. She knew something of the lady's reputation as an active—perhaps over-active—philanthropist, and she was on the alert in a moment.

Mrs. Croil gave her a little nod, which was just a trifle distant and patronising, for she had a horror of the stage and everything connected with it.

"I have seen him in the school and at the

vicar's," said the lady, rather loftily, "and I took a fancy to him at once. I'm going to get him into my Home for you, and have him taught a trade, and turned into a useful member of society."

Mary was horror-struck.

"Oh, no, no, thank you very much," said she, hurriedly; "but—but—you don't know all the circumstances. It would be better for him, if you please, to remain with me!"

Mrs. Croil, in great disgust, raised her eyeglass and looked frigidly at the impudent "subordinate from one of the theatres."

"Better for him to remain with *you* than to go into *my* Home for Indigent Boys?" she gasped at last.

"I beg your pardon," said Mary very quietly. "Your Home is an excellent institution, I've no doubt, for boys who have no home of their own. But this child has a little nest of love and care, and there's no Institution in the world that could make up the loss of it to him."

"You are standing in the child's light for your own selfish pleasure—or interest!" said Mrs. Croil, coldly. "Here comes the boy. Have you any objection to my asking him a few questions?"

She seemed to expect a refusal, but Mary said at once, "Certainly. I will send him to you."

As she spoke she moved forward, perceiving her little one in the crowd who now came swarming out through the iron gates.

Greville flung his arms round her, and as he did so his cap fell off, revealing his curly brown head, with its one marked peculiarity—a curly lock of silver-white hair growing among the rest on his left temple. Mrs. Croil perceived this singular freak of nature for the first time, and turning to the vicar said, in a tone loud enough for Mary to catch the words, "Dear me, what a strange look that white curl gives to this side of the boy's face, a sort of distinction." The vicar assented, and she went on, "There's one of the best families in England—I forget which for the moment—who are said all to have a white curl like that!"

These words set Mary thinking, wondering, hoping. What if this should be one of the marks by which Greville's identity might be established?

The next moment she was kissing the boy again, and telling him that there was a lady who wished to speak to him.

Greville picked up his cap, and approached Mrs. Croil shyly, but with a pleasant, open, boyish manner.

Mrs. Croil stooped a little, and assumed her most persuasive manner.

"Well, my little boy, and so you've got no mama, I hear?" she began kindly.

Greville looked surprised, but he answered promptly—

"Oh, yes, I have. I've got two!"

Mary looked rather anxious, as Mrs. Croil went on primly—

“Two mamas?”

“Yes. One I know, and the other I don’t know,” said Greville simply.

Mrs. Croil gave a half-hearted laugh.

“Oh, I suppose you call Miss Gold the mama you know?”

“Yes,” said Greville. “And she says I’ve got another who’s nicer and prettier than she is. But I don’t believe it!”

Mrs. Croil turned the subject rather tartly.

“Have you been taught to say your prayers?”

“Oh, yes; Mary taught me!”

Mrs. Croil grew a little impatient. She tried another tack.

“Now, tell me, Greville, wouldn’t you like to go to a nice place, where you’ll be taught to grow up a useful man, and to be a printer or a carpenter?”

But Greville answered promptly, though with perfect courtesy—

“No; I don’t want to be a printer or a carpenter.”

“Well, what do you want to be, then?”

“I’m going to be a gentleman,” said Greville, simply.

Mrs. Croil turned up her eyes a little, and threw a contemptuous glance at Mary.

“And do you know what being a gentleman means?” asked she drily.

Greville answered with great gravity, as if he were repeating the articles of a creed.

"Yes. It means I've got to keep my hands clean, and to speak the truth and be polite ; and to thrash the boy who beats a lame horse ; and when I wash my face—to wash *under the hair*."

"And a very good creed too !" cried the Vicar, laughing.

Mary smiled, and Mrs. Croil looked rather annoyed. She said quickly, with some acidity—

"And since you're going to be a gentleman, pray how are you going to earn your living ?"

"I'm going to drive a hansom, like Tippetts !" was the prompt and rather disconcerting reply.

The vicar came to the rescue, as Mrs. Croil drew back in disgust at the failure of her well-meant efforts.

"I think, Mrs. Croil, you must give him up as a hopeless case," said he.

And Mrs. Croil reluctantly, but with even more of annoyance than reluctance, thought so too.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE GARRINGTON LOCK

IF in Mary Gold the little fellow had a kind and judicious guardian, in Tippetts he had a worshipper of an even more ardent kind. For, while Mary was ready to correct the child, when she felt it to be necessary and right, Tippetts would have submitted willingly to be trampled in the earth by "the young master," as he always called Greville.

Tippetts had got on in the world since those Bristol days when he had considered the collection of "toppers" a lucrative employment. He had profited by Mary's friendship and kindness to improve himself; and though his scholarship never became profound, and his English remained racy rather than classical, he had become, by the time Greville was seven years of age, and he himself was twenty-two, one of the best drivers in the service of a well-known livery-stable keeper, the possessor of a good salary, and of a remarkably dashing sweetheart.

The owner of his affections was a young woman of striking appearance, with black eyes and a good

figure, who sang and played the mandoline on race-courses, and who flattered herself, on the strength of the intercourse with the upper classes she thus obtained, that she was a great figure in the world of fashion.

Tippets' only grief was that she looked down upon Mary Gold as a "dowdy," and pityingly bewailed to her sweetheart that young woman's lack of "style."

"A good creature, my deah fellah," she would say, in a mixture of languid drawl and Cockney accent, when they had been together to have tea with Mary and little Greville, "and not a bad figger ! But no dash, no life, no go ! Wouldn't do in our set ! Not for nuts !"

This modest little floweret's name was "Poppy"—Miss Poppy Binks—and her clothes, which were always of the latest style of the penny fashion books, though the materials might leave something to be desired in the matter of texture and colour, were the surprise of Ascot—as she fancied ; and the admiration of the Mile End Road—as she knew !

If Tippets loved Greville, his affection was returned with great goodwill. The one passion of the child's heart, next to his love for Mary Gold and his admiration for Tippets, was his fondness for horses and all connected with them.

This trait was hereditary, as Mary Gold had discovered. For, as Tippets heard all the racing talk of the times in the course of his daily work, he had

been able to find out for her that the late Lord Shelvin had kept a racing stud, and had been a noted "whip" in his day.

There was no pleasure little Greville liked so much as to be allowed to ride out with Tippetts on a pony which that young man could sometimes get for him ; or failing that, to be taken out in a dog-cart with Tippetts and the elegant "Poppy," and to be allowed to take his first lessons in driving under his friend's auspices.

"You must take me into your stable, sir, when you get to be a great gentleman," Tippetts, who was not so reticent as Mary, used to say to him. "And you must let me pick you out a good 'un or two to start with, and go on till you win a Derby."

And Greville would laugh gleefully, and agree to everything suggested, and set himself in all seriousness to understand the mysteries of laying the odds, until Mary discovered these occult studies, and indignantly demanded what Tippetts had been teaching him.

But Tippetts, quite as indignant as she, had his answer ready.

"Aren't you always sayin'," he asked with dignity, "that Master Greville must have the eddication of a gentleman ? Well, and what gentleman don't know all about the odds ? Tell me that."

But the friendship, strange as it was, between the roughly brought up lad and the tenderly cared for

child, did harm to neither. It made Tippetts gentle and the child shrewd. For Tippetts diversified his teachings with keen-witted remarks upon men and things, quite as instructive in their way as the more academic teaching of the Board School.

At the latter end of April, three months before Greville completed his seventh year, Tippetts and the child had many earnest conversations together, which culminated in their making to Mary Gold the audacious proposal that Tippetts should take Greville to Epsom on the first day of the Spring Meeting.

Mary was aghast. She was angry with Tippetts for putting such an idea into the boy's head. She told him the racecourse was no place for a child ; she was indignant, amazed.

But Tippetts persisted.

"I won't let him come to harm," said he. "And it would be a real treat for him, I know."

"He'd see things he ought not to see—he might even meet people—his own family"—and Mary's cheeks grew white—"whom he must not meet ! They are all interested in racing—you've told me so. And that hateful Captain Garrington"—Mary never would call him by any other name—"is sure to be there !"

"What does that matter ?" pleaded Tippetts earnestly. "They won't guess who the child is. He's set his little heart on going, and there's nothing at the Spring Meeting for you to mind him seeing.

It'll be a nice outing for the child ; that's all."

And in the end Mary, against her better judgment, gave way, and let them go.

It was quite true that Tippetts was a guardian as absolutely trustworthy as she herself. He was a steady young fellow, and the long drive down on the phaeton Tippetts could borrow would be a pleasant change for the town-bred child, who was not too often in the fresh air of the country.

"Poppy," of whom Mary could only half approve as a companion for her little one, was not to be of the party. It was to be a *tête-à-tête* drive, and they were to return early.

It was a lovely day, and although Mary took care to tuck Greville's little waterproof into a corner of the phaeton, there was little prospect of so much as an April shower.

Both Tippetts and his small companion were in the highest spirits. The horse was a good one, and they did the journey to Epsom quickly, and arrived on the course just in time for the first race of the day.

As Tippetts had said, there was no reason why the boy should not have come. Instead of the enormous crowd, the crush and the rush of the Summer Meeting, there were only enough people to make the scene lively ; and the ladies looked their best in the furs they still had an excuse for wearing, though

the day was not cold enough to make noses red and lips blue.

The horse had been taken out of the phaeton, and they had seen one race, when Greville asked if he might get down and see the Punch and Judy show which was set up on the outer edge of the ground.

So they got down, saw the ever-entrancing performance, and then went in and out among the shows and the groups of people. Greville was delighted with all he saw, as he trotted along, holding Tippetts by the hand, with his cap pushed back and his cheeks glowing in the wind.

As they went along, the boy chattering very fast to his companion in his excitement, they caught the attention of an elderly gentleman in a long, light racing coat, with a field-glass in his hand. He looked, smiled, and looked again. At last he began to look puzzled, and stared so intently from the one to the other of the oddly assorted pair that Tippetts took the alarm, and pulled the boy quickly aside, to make a cross-cut among the crowd back to their own vehicle.

As they went, however, they had to pass close to an open landau in which a group of ladies were sitting. One of these, rapidly as he passed the carriage, attracted Tippetts by the beauty and sweetness of her face, and by a certain strange expression, a compound of fear and melancholy, which made him look again.

As he did so, he was startled to hear a voice behind him cry—

“Lady Liliass, look at that boy! Look, look, that one! He’s got the Garrington lock!”

And Tippetts, amazed and struck with something like alarm at the sound of the well-known name, stopped for a second, and glanced back at the speaker.

It was the elderly gentleman who had already attracted his attention. And before Tippetts could get away the boy was grasped by the shoulder, and forcibly but kindly taken away from his companion.

“Allow me—one moment,” said the gentleman good-humouredly, and with some appearance of more than transient interest.

And leading the astonished boy by the hand, he went close up to the side of the carriage, and lifted Greville up in his arms for inspection by the ladies.

“Look, Lady Liliass! look at him!” cried he.

And Tippetts, with a great throb of excitement, looked at the lady he addressed, and saw that it was the one with the sad, sweet face, and uttered a little cry as he recognised the fact that the child was being shown to his own mother.

There was a moment’s pause. Then it was one of the other ladies who spoke. And Tippetts saw that the one he had heard addressed as “Lady Liliass” had grown deadly pale. She stared at

the boy without speaking, while one of her companions cried—

“Why, General, he *is* like them ! He’s really like some of the pictures. Lady Liliás, don’t you——”

She turned to the pale lady, but got no answer. Lady Liliás was still staring at the boy with eyes that seemed to pierce to his very soul.

Tippets, so much moved that he could not trust himself to speak, came a step nearer and laid one hand on the boy, who was red, and trembling, and half-crying, stirred by some strange feeling he could not understand, and frightened by this sudden burst of curiosity on the part of all these strangers.

Then the gentleman spoke again.

“Lady Liliás,” said he, with sudden gravity, “you’re going out of England the day after to-morrow. Don’t you think it’s worth while to make some inquiries, to get these people to see your lawyers, eh ?”

Tippets came nearer still, with his mouth wide open. Was this the beginning of the time when the young master would come into his own again ?

There was a moment’s pause. Lady Liliás still stared feverishly at the child ; the other ladies, in silence, looked at her.

The next moment, however, she turned her head away abruptly, and bursting into an hysterical laugh,

shook her head with decision and sat back in the carriage, shutting her eyes as if in disgust.

"See my lawyer ? Make inquiries ? No. Why ? Take the child away."

Greville burst out crying. Although he did not know what Tippetts knew, that he had been thus repulsed by his own mother, yet the revulsion of feeling caused by the sudden change from interest to coldness in the lady cut the little lad to the heart.

He turned towards Tippetts, and held out his arms to him, begging to be taken away.

"Tippetts, Tippetts, let me get down. Please let me get down."

Lady Liliass's voice rang out again, sharply, irritably—

"Yes, yes ; take the child away."

Then Greville broke down altogether.

"Yes, Tippetts, take me home—home to Mary !" cried he, as the gentleman released him, and let the boy run away with his friend.

CHAPTER XXIV

ON THE TRACK

“**C**OME along, come away !” whispered Tippetts, excitedly, as he suddenly caught sight of another gentleman, much younger than the first, who was making his way to the carriage at that moment.

Tippetts did not know Lord Shelvin by sight, but it seemed to him probable that this handsome but rather dissipated-looking man might be that very cousin and rival of the boy of whom they were all so much in dread ; and as he looked round again, on his way to the place where he had put up his horse, he saw that this gentleman was listening with a frown on his face to an explanation from one of the ladies in the carriage, which Tippetts guessed to refer to the boy.

He felt a throb of relief that nobody had had time or thought to ask Greville his name. The child would have given it quite simply ; and he would undoubtedly have been detained, and straightway have found himself at the mercy of his cousin.

Tippets saw with alarm that Lord Shelvin—for he could scarcely doubt that it was he—left the ladies abruptly, and went away, as Tippets guessed, in search of the boy. He plunged into the crowd, therefore, in order to be lost to the viscount's sight ; and finding his horse, had him harnessed again to the phaeton as quickly as he could, and started on the return journey to town without a moment's unnecessary delay.

Mary Gold guessed, the moment she heard the voices of Tippets and the child on the stairs much earlier than she had expected them, that something had happened.

When she had heard the whole story, however, her energy and her courage returned together. Springing up from the chair on which she had been sitting, and clasping the child in her arms, she cried out with spirit—

“Tippets, the time's come. We must make a dash for it now. We must go through with it ; for we shall never have a better chance !”

Greville clung to her, trembling.

“Mary,” whispered he, “I don't want to go away from you. I don't want to belong to those people ; they are not kind, like you. Even the beautiful lady that I liked told Tippets to take me away.”

But Mary would never believe that the mother's denial of her child had been more than a ruse.

“She couldn't help herself,” Greville,” whispered

she, with her eyes full of tears. "That beautiful lady was your mother, dear, your own mother ! I'm sure of it ! She would have taken you to her poor heart if she had dared. And I'm going to see her, to tell her that she must dare ! And if she's afraid for you," went on Mary, as she sprang up and flashed her eyes on Tippetts with a fierceness which he understood, though the child did not, "she can keep me by you. I should like to see the man or the woman who would be able to harm my boy while I was there !"

Greville had never been told of the nature and extent of the danger which threatened him at Drake's Hall. But even his childish mind had long since understood that there were perils in the way of that wonderful position they talked about ; and now he clung to Mary more tightly than ever.

But she cheered him, encouraged him ; she told him he was going to bring happiness back to his mother's heart, that he was going to grow up to be a comfort and a joy to her.

"What ! aren't I a comfort and a joy to you, Mary ?" asked the child. "And won't you miss me if I have to go away ?"

This was too much for poor Mary, who could only sob and sigh,, and tell him not to spoil her courage and his own by asking her such questions. God would take care of them all, she said ; and they

must trust in Him, and go straight on and do their duty, whether they liked the way or not.

"But, Polly, how will you get at her? She's going out of England the day after to-morrow; I heard them say so," asked Tippetts.

Mary paused for an instant, perplexed.

"I wonder," she said at last, thoughtfully, "where she'll be to-morrow; whether she'll be at Epsom again."

"Lord Shelvin's going to run a horse to-morrow for the 'City and Surburban,'" said Tippetts; "so she might be there, mightn't she?"

"Then I'll go too!" cried Mary, energetically. "But who's to take care of my boy while I'm gone? I don't want to leave him alone."

A new fear had taken possession of her, now that she knew that Lord Shelvin had seen and tried to follow her boy.

"Why," said Tippetts, "get my Poppy to take care of him. She's the best-hearted girl in the world, and as sharp as they make 'em. She won't let nobody come nigh the child to harm him."

These remarks they had exchanged in an undertone, for fear of alarming Greville, who had not yet recovered from the shock which the day's adventure had given to his childish mind.

This suggestion Mary was forced to accept, although she did not put so much faith in the discretion of the talkative Poppy as Tippetts did.

It occurred to Mary that it would be a good idea for her to borrow Miss Binks's mandoline, which she could herself play a little, and to go to the race-course in the guise of a black and white pierrette, which would enable her to wear a mask, after the fashion of the day for such entertainers. She had no doubt that, by watching her opportunity, she would be able to speak to Lady Lilius; and she hoped that the strength of her own feelings would give her eloquence enough to persuade the timid lady to take strong action on behalf of the son whom, Mary felt sure, she was ready in her heart to acknowledge.

When Mary reached the course on the following day, she saw at once that she would have to use the greatest caution in the affair she had in hand. For not only did she see, for the first time for seven years, the two rascals, Dowells and Snoddy, who had played so important a part in the events of that October night at Bristol, but she saw also Jack Mallory, in a phaeton on the course, with his sister Hannah and a man whom, by his likeness to them both, she guessed to be their brother.

Hannah's appearance had undergone a considerable change in the years which had passed since Mary saw her kissing Lord Shelvin in the wood near Drake's Hall. She had lost much of her girlish freshness, and looked peevish and ill-tempered; while on the other hand she was much better

dressed than she had been of old. She kept casting anxious glances in the direction of Lord Shelvin, whom Mary recognised as he walked about the ground.

The viscount had grown much older-looking, and he looked ill and harassed. Although she knew that his age was only forty, he had the appearance of a man at least ten years older; while the sulky frown which seemed to be the habitual expression of his face took away all remains of his former good looks. He looked sallow and red of eyes, while the constant nervous twitching of his features bespoke anything but a sound mind in a healthy body.

Lord Shelvin, who had been looking anxiously about him, went up to his trusty agents as soon as they came upon the ground.

A change had come over the relative positions of the partners. Snode, the junior, had now taken the upper hand, and was better-dressed than ever, while Dowells, who now followed his partner's lead in everything, had grown shabbier and more careless in his dress as the years went on. They offered a greater contrast than ever.

It was Snode who took the lead in addressing Lord Shelvin.

"Ah, Lord Shelvin, we got your wire. But what on earth made you give us an appointment here?"

A change had come over his tone in speaking to his client. The viscount had got well in the toils,

between his profligacy and his reckless extravagance; and Dowells and Snode took advantage of the fact.

"Something important, you may be sure," said Lord Shelvin shortly. "The child *has* turned up! He was brought up to his mother yesterday, by a fellow named Tippets, who looks like a groom. You've got to find him. The bull must be taken by the horns now. You must find him and bring him to me. And we must kill the fatted calf—first. And then"—and his face contracted with an ugly smile—"why, we can look round."

"Haven't I told you," said Snode, in a more drawling tone than ever, "how unwise it is to meet danger half-way? Let their side take the first step. And then fight, fight every step of the way."

"Nonsense," said the Viscount shortly. "I tell you the brat's been seen, that he is the image of his father when he was a boy. There was just enough fuss made about the child yesterday to show the people who've got him that the game's worth playing. If he gets taken to Lord Gillingham's now, it will be all up with us. No, we must make the first move, and bring him forward ourselves."

"I don't agree with you," said Snode.

"Nor do I," chimed in Dowells, not liking to be left out in the cold.

Lord Shelvin shrugged his shoulders.

"Very well," said he. "If you can't help me, I think I've found somebody who can."

"And pray, your lordship, who's that?" snorted Dowells.

"Mrs. Sweech, of Bristol. I wired to her also last night, telling her to go up to London, and to track out a person named Tippetts, if she can. Probably she will be able to. And from the man to the child is an easy step."

Snode looked at Dowells, and Dowells looked back at Snode.

"I don't think you will find this woman a better agent than we, Lord Shelvin," said Snode. "What do you think, Mr. Dowells?"

"I'm sure you won't," returned Dowells.

Lord Shelvin shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, gentlemen, you can help me or not as you please. If you don't find the child for me, somebody else will. I'm going to have this matter threshed out once and for all!"

"Do we do it, Mr. Dowells?" asked Snode, with a little pinched smile.

"We do, Mr. Snode," answered Dowells promptly. The viscount nodded.

"Come with me, then. We'll go to the weighing room, and I'll tell you what I propose."

As they strolled away together, they were watched by two persons, both of whom were filled with apprehension at the sight.

One of these was Lady Liliass, who sat, as white as the dead, alone in her carriage, while the rest of the party who had accompanied her were standing on the grass a few paces off.

The second person was Mary, who, under cover of her mask, was able to walk about among the crowd without fear of recognition.

This at least was what she thought until, coming suddenly close to the wheels of Jack Mallory's phaeton, she saw that the gamekeeper himself, the sight of whom filled her with strange and varied emotions, was watching her movements with curious intentness.

Surely it was not possible that he recognised her ?

Feeling scarcely sure of herself as long as she remained in his vicinity, she went away, humming and touching the strings of her mandoline as she went, as if in search of a good "pitch" for her entertainment.

She had not gone far, however, when she heard her own name uttered softly behind her in a voice which sent a thrill through her. Turning slowly, half unwilling, half eager, she found herself face to face with Jack Mallory.

"How — did you know me ? " whispered she, tremulously, thankful for the little black mask which hid her blushing cheeks.

"I should know your walk, your voice, the shape of your hand—anywhere," answered Jack, with such

a look of pleasure in his eyes, such a ring of passion in his voice, that Mary could not answer for a moment, but could only stand, with her head bent, pretending to play the instrument in her hand.

“Had you forgotten, then?” he asked softly.

She roused herself by a strong effort. She must not let her own sentiments, her own heart-throbs, interfere with the urgent business on which she had come.

“I want to speak to Lady Liliass,” said she, tremulously. “I want to persuade her to own her child!”

“Come then — now,” whispered Jack. “And when you leave the course, I will watch you, and meet you, and go back with you to town. If the young master is to come back to his own, let me come with him, *and with you.*”

The tone in which he uttered the last three words intoxicated Mary. It showed her that he had not forgotten, that he had treasured the remembrance of her in his heart through all these years, as she had hoarded up her memories of him.

In silence, but with a full heart, she followed him until she stood beside Lady Liliass's carriage.

“My lady,” said Jack, softly, as the pale lady started at his tone; “here is some one who wants to speak to you. It is the guardian of the young master, the woman who has kept him safe for you all these years!”

With a low cry, Lady Liliass turned towards Mary, her eyes full of a strange light—

“Oh,” cried she, “I cannot bear it! I don’t know what to do, I don’t know what to hope, what to fear!”

But Mary’s sweet voice, full of deep feeling, interrupted her. She told her the story of the past years, of her boy’s growth in beauty and manliness and gentleness and courage; so kindly, so tenderly that the mother listened quietly yet eagerly, with the tears running down her face, while Jack, just out of hearing, stood by, almost as much moved as either of them.

But there was another spectator of the scene, who watched it with jaundiced eyes. This was Hannah, who perceived that there was something of importance in hand, and who was on the look-out for an opportunity of regaining her lost hold upon the viscount by filling, to some purpose, her old office of spy.

As soon as she caught sight of Lord Shelvin, therefore, returning slowly from the weighing-room with one of his worthy accomplices on each side of him, she slipped down from the phaeton, and ran through the crowd to meet him.

“My lord,” cried she eagerly, as he frowned at the sight of her, “I have something to tell you. Lady Liliass,” pursued she, as he dismissed the two other men with a nod, and walked a

few steps away with her, "Lady Liliass has been got at!"

"Got at!"

"Yes. And though she's masked, I'm sure it's by the woman who came spying about at Drake's Hall nearly seven years ago. The woman, the theatre woman, that my brother's mad about! That's who it is, my lord, I'm sure!"

Lord Shelvin lost no time. Turning almost green, he gave her a nod, went back to Dowells and Snode, and told them what he had heard. And while he spoke, he was making his way back to the carriage as fast as he could.

Jack perceived them before they got very near, and warned Mary to go. With the hastiest of leave-takings, she left Lady Liliass, who was still in tears, and darted away among the crowd.

Lord Shelvin shot an angry glance at Jack when he saw that the woman had escaped.

Seizing Snode by the arm, he whispered hoarsely—

"Find her, follow her, track her down; and get at the child to-night!"

Snode nodded and dragged away with him the less nimble Dowells.

"What—what—what have we got to do?" panted Dowells, as he ran.

"Follow the woman!" repeated Snode briefly.

And as he spoke he chuckled to himself; for he had caught sight of Mary.

CHAPTER XXV

POPPY'S DISCRETION

WHILE Mary was on the racecourse at Epsom, the time was passing very slowly for poor little Greville and his temporary guardian, the accomplished Miss Poppy Binks.

By Mary's wish, the boy had stayed away from school that day, in order to avoid all risk of his being kidnapped; and although he did his best to entertain the fair Poppy, he found this very hard work.

Lolling almost at full length across the pretty window-seat which Mary had herself contrived in one of the two garret windows of the little sitting-room, Poppy looked disconsolately from the canary in its cage to the table with its blue and white cover, thence to the hanging bookcase on the wall, at the green rush-bottomed chairs, and at a tall vase full of dried bulrushes and long grasses which prettily filled one corner of the room.

"Not much serciety in this part of the world, 'ave

yer?" she drawled at last, after a languid look at the clock.

Little Greville, who was sitting by the fire, in his own smartly cushioned armchair, nursing a large tabby cat, looked up in surprise.

"Oh, yes, we have plenty," said he, with a smile. "Mary has me and the cat, and I have the cat and Mary. And then there's Tippetts; and sometimes we go to the vicar's, to tea."

"Ter the vicar's ter tea!" sneered Poppy contemptuously. "You're both easily pleased! I suppose yer never go aw'y for a change?"

"Sometimes Mary takes me out into the country for a walk. Once last summer we went a long way, and brought back those." And he pointed with great pride to the bulrushes.

Miss Binks smiled scornfully.

"Oh, them's common things. I like gardenias and horchids and flowers like that, what the toffs wear in their button-holes. I get lots o' them given me. Flowers that grows in gentlemen's 'othouses and gardens. I suppose you've never seen a garden?"

"Oh, yes, we've got one ourselves," said Greville proudly. And jumping up, still hugging the cat, he ran across the room and pointed out of the nearest window. "Look at that seat out there. In summer the nasturtiums and canariensis grow right over it; and it's quite beautiful to sit out there and learn

my lessons in the evening, while Mary's at the theatre."

The elegant Poppy looked languidly out, and laughed contemptuously.

"Why, its only the roof of the kitching, dodged up with flower-pots and beanpoles!" cried she. "My, what a plice!"

"I'm sorry you don't like it," said Greville, with a sigh. "I don't know what else to show you to amuse you, since you don't care for books, or birds, or cats, or in fact anything."

"Why, *you* amuse me!" said Poppy, laughing affectedly. "Yer see, this hain't the style of thing I'm accustomed to. It's all a matter o' habit! Now I dessay your friend Miss Gold's as much bored on the ricecourse as I ham 'ere," and Poppy yawned.

"I wonder if she'll be back soon?" said Greville wistfully, as he came back to his little willow-green chair, and looked at the fire.

"Dunno, I'm shaw," said Miss Binks. "Time's a-gittin' on, ain't it?" And they both looked at the clock. "I wonder if the Juke's there to-day?" she went on wistfully. "'E'll wonder wot's become of me, that 'e will! An' Lord Dunthorpe, and the Hearl of Carstairs. They're shaw ter miss me, an' arst if I'm dead! But there—it's no use cryin' over spilt milk! And I shall meet 'em all before Hascot."

"A Duke, and an Earl, and Lord Dunthorpe!"

repeated Greville with some surprise. "They're very grand people, aren't they?"

"*Smart* people! *Smart's* the word, not grand," corrected Poppy. "Yus, they are smart. But there!—I mix so much among 'em, I don't think anythink of it, I don't."

"They're all your friends, you say?" said Greville quietly.

"I should think they was!" said Poppy, smiling.

"But it's Tippetts who's your sweetheart, isn't it?" persisted Greville, with gravity.

"Well, yus, so he calls hisself!" admitted she.

There was a pause, during which Greville was evidently engaged in thinking something out. At last he said, with the disconcerting solemnity of childhood—

"There's a great deal of difference between Tippetts and a duke, isn't there?"

"I believe yer," said Poppy.

"Then why," pursued Greville gravely, "didn't you take a duke for a sweetheart, instead of Tippetts?"

Poppy, who had been reclining in an easy attitude, sat up and stared at the child. At last she said with a nod—

"You ain't such a juggins as you look, young shaver!"

At which compliment, which he felt to be undeserved, Greville blushed.

At that moment, as if to relieve the monotony of which the lady complained, a piano-organ in the street below struck up a lively air. Poppy sprang to her feet in an instant.

"Look here," said she, "you've been tryin' to amuse me ; now I'll take my turn, and see if I can't amuse you. Do you like dancing ? I mean, to watch it ?"

"Oh, yes, there's nothing I like better 'than to see Mary practice her steps !" cried Greville.

Miss Binks shrugged her brawny shoulders.

"Oh, *her* steps !" she cried, trying not to be too disdainful. "I can show you somethink more up-ter-dite than that ! Somethink I do in the 'alls, in the wintertime, and that fetches 'em fine !"

And Poppy, clearing a way for herself by pushing the table and chairs into a corner, gave the wondering child a specimen of her skill in a vigorous high-kicking performance, finishing up by a most astounding somersault in which she and her skirts seemed to fill the small apartment to overflowing. It was muscular, it was agile ; but it was not dancing. And even Greville, who tried to be sufficiently complimentary, felt this.

"That's something more lively than Miss Gold's twirls and tiptoeings, ain't it ?" asked Poppy, as she sat in the middle of the floor, resting, quite satisfied with herself, after her exertions.

The answer came from an unexpected quarter.

"It's beautiful ! Puffickly beautiful, that's what it is ! Never see sich dancing in all my born days, never !" cried a husky voice from the door, which had, unperceived by either of the occupants of the room, been pushed ajar by some one from the outside.

And the next moment a neat, clean-looking old woman, in a carefully folded shawl, a simply made bonnet and plain stuff dress, edged her way slowly and insinuatingly into the room.

At the first sound of the strange voice, Greville had run up to Poppy, who was now scrambling to her feet with a good-humoured laugh, not sorry to be interrupted in her *tête-à-tête* with the boy.

"Hallo, old lidy ! You did give me a start ! Where did you spring from ?" cried she, as she smoothed her ruffled hair.

"Why, I didn't spring from nowheres, lovey," replied Mrs. Sweech : for it was indeed that amiable lady. And as she spoke, she turned and shut the door. "I come up and knocked in the reg'lar way, but you wos so busy a-singing and a-dancin' as you didn't hear me. And then when I opened the door an' peeped in, you wos sich a pretty sight with your twists an' your twirls, that I çlean forgot wot I was come about, that I did !"

Poppy was delighted to find that she had had a spectator of her skill more appreciative than little Greville. But the boy himself looked apprehen-

sively at Mrs. Sweech, and kept close to Poppy's side.

"Well, an' what 'ave you come about, eh !" cried Miss Binks, in high good humour.

"Well, I'm a-lookin' for a wery old friend of mine, as I come up to Lunnon larst night 'spressly ter see—for to tell 'im as 'ow his granny's died an' left him a fortin'," replied Mrs. Sweech, staring hard at Greville as she spoke.

"Lor !" cried Poppy, much interested. "An' who's the lucky chap ?"

"Well, it ain't 'is right name ; but old friends like I am calls 'im Tippetts," replied Mrs. Sweech.

"Tippetts !" screamed Poppy. "Tippetts been left a fortin ! Why 'e's my young man, Tippetts is ! An' now 'e can marry me, an' give me a carridge and pair ! Oh my, wot luck ! Sit down, ma'am, an' tell us all about it."

But in the midst of her excitement, Poppy felt Greville pulling at her dress, and saw him looking up warningly into her face.

"Mary said you were not to let any one in," whispered he in her ear, as she stooped impatiently to take the folds of her dress out of his hands. But she was too much excited to heed any warning, and she answered his whisper aloud—

"Oh bother Mary, an' 'er fads ! I'm goin' to 'ear all about this, as sure as my nime's Poppy Binks."

And jerking up her elbow and raising her right

hand, in what she believed to be the fashionable hand-shake, Poppy turned to Mrs. Sweech effusively: "Delighted ter meet you, I'm shaw! Will you sit 'ere?" And she drew a chair forward from the corner, and seated herself near. "Wot's the nime of the lidy as left it? An' wot's the figger of the fortin'?"

"Wait a bit! Wait a bit!" said Mrs. Sweech, who never took her eyes off Greville. "First let me git my breath arter those stairs."

"An' what mide you come an' look fer Tippetts 'ere?" asked Poppy.

"I knowed where abouts in Lunnon 'e come from, so I come up to inquire, an' found out his lodgings easy. An' as he wasn't at 'ome, they said as he might be round at this address. An' who's this dear little boy?" Mrs. Sweech went on, as she made a grab at Greville, who stepped out of her way. "I'm that fond of little boys, I am! Won't you give me a kiss, little boy?"

"No, thank you," replied Greville, courteously but decidedly, as he edged farther away from the effusive visitor, whom he instinctively mistrusted.

"Why, where's yer manners that Miss Gold's so proud of?" asked Poppy sharply. "Go an' kiss the lidy direckly! 'E's bin spoilt, that's wot it is, an' taught to call hisself a gentleman, till he thinks hisself too good fer anybody."

"Taught to call hisself a gentleman, eh?" cried

Mrs. Sweech, seizing him as soon as he had come reluctantly nearer. "An' wots your name, my little dear?"

But Greville, seized with sudden shyness and mistrust, hung his head, and mumbled incoherently.

"Why, wot's come to the child?" said Poppy sharply. "You can speak out fast enough most times! 'Is nime's Greville Garrington——"

"Greville Garrington?" echoed Mrs. Sweech, unable to repress a start. The next moment she seized her own right elbow, and bent forward as if in violent pain. "Sich a stitch of rheumatis in my right arm. It almost breaks me in two sometimes, it do! An' so your name's Greville Garrington?" she went on, turning to the boy. "An' a verry pretty name too, I'm sure! And 'oo is it as has the care of you, my little dear? Father, mother, or wot?"

"Mary," answered Greville in a strangled voice.

"An' I'm sure Mary must be proud of such a nice little boy!" cried Mrs. Sweech. Then, as if a sudden thought had darted into her mind, she added, "Oh, I s'pose then it was Mary I saw down at the door jest now as I come up."

"Dressed in a black, an' white git-up, with a long cloak an' a mandoline?" asked Poppy quickly.

"Yes, yes, that's it!" replied Mrs. Sweech with a nod.

"No, it wasn't Mary," broke in Greville quickly.

"She would have come straight upstairs back to me."

"Ark at 'im!" cried Poppy derisively. "Who else could it be in that git-up?"

"S'pose you vos ter run down an' see, my dear," suggested Mrs. Sweech, persuasively.

"All right," said Poppy, as, delighted to think that her imprisonment was over, she sprang across to the door.

Greville, seeing her go, attempted to run after her. But Mrs. Sweech jumped up, with surprising nimbleness, and seized and held him firmly.

"No, you stay with me, deary, an' tell me all about yerself!" cried she, in a coaxing tone. "The young lady won't be gone above a minute."

But Greville still struggled, until Poppy turned at the door to say—

"No, you wait 'ere, ducky. You know you vos told to wait 'ere!"

The next moment she had slammed the door behind her, and Mrs. Sweech was left alone with the child.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE SOFT SIDE OF GRANNY SWEECH'S TONGUE

NOW Greville had never heard of Mrs. Sweech, so that his mistrust of her was partly instinctive, and partly the result of Mary's own nervous fears about him. When the old woman had him thus to herself she knew how to assume a tone which quickly allayed the boy's fears.

"An' wot makes you so anxious to run away from me?" she asked, in the very same tone and manner which had imposed upon his own mother seven years before. "Are you shy with strangers?"

"I don't think so," replied Greville, still rather reluctantly. "Mary says it's silly to be shy."

"You're wery fond of Mary, ain't you?"

"Oh, yes," answered Greville, a little smile appearing about his mouth at the thought of her.

"Fonder of her than anybody?"

"Yes—except my mother," answered Greville, his tone changing and becoming plaintive on the last words.

Mrs. Sweech smiled and patted him on the head. She wanted a moment to evolve a plan for getting the child away.

"Ah," she said at last, "that's right, that's right, my boy, to be fond of your mother. 'Specially such a mother as you've got!"

"Why, do you know her?" cried Greville, eagerly.

"Know 'er? Bless the boy! I should think I did! Hain't she a tall, pale lady, with the sweetest blue eyes you ever see, an' the softest golden 'air a-comin' down each side of her face like a picter?"

"Yes, yes," cried Greville, eagerly. "She's like that, just like that!"

"Of course she is! An' didn't she look more of a picter than ever this mornin', when she says ter me, 'Granny, my dear,' says she (for she always calls me Granny), 'jest you come with me to where my little boy lives. For I've jest found out,' says she. 'Right you are, my lady,' says I. An' so 'ere we've come!"

"*We!*" echoed the boy, with a tone of strange wistfulness. "Is *she* with you—my mother?"

"Why, of course she is," replied Mrs. Sweech, laughing. "Do you think she'd 'ave trusted any one but her own self for to fetch you, when once she'd found yer hout?"

"Where is she, then?" asked Greville, who was trembling all over, between his longing to see his

THE MASTER-KEY

mother again now that she wanted him, and his instinctive fear of taking any step without Mary.

"Why, she's in her own lovely kerridge in that little side-street at the back there, 'cos she didn't want no crowd to gather round when she got her boy. So she's sent me up for to fetch you, and I'm to take you down and across the yard and hout by the back way. So come along."

She put her hand down, not too impatiently, but with a kindly gesture, towards the boy. But Greville hung back, frightened and half-crying.

"I'd rather wait till Mary comes back," said he in a whisper. "She won't be long, if it's really true you saw her downstairs."

"She's met your ma, I s'pose, and she's talking to her," suggested the wily Mrs. Sweech.

This seemed just possible to Greville, who, though he knew there were such persons as liars in the world, had lived in such an atmosphere of love and truth that he was easily deceived.

"S'pose you was to go down by yourself and see," suggested Mrs. Sweech, who had her own reasons for wishing to be left alone in the room for a few seconds. "You go down the stairs, and werry like you'll meet her before you git more'n 'arfway down. And I'll come arter you, and tell her all about it!"

Very reluctantly, and yet without any sense of his great danger, remembering only that Mary had told him to stay where he was till she came back,

Greville took up his hat and went slowly downstairs. He was arguing with himself, poor child, in his innocence, that this message was from his mother, and that Mary had told him he must obey his mother in everything, just as he had obeyed her.

Half-way down he thought that the woman who had been sent to fetch him might forget to leave a message for Mary, and he could not let her come and find him gone, without a word to tell her what had become of him.

So he ran upstairs again, and having found a half-sheet of notepaper in his pocket, he wrote this message on it, and stuck it with a pin on the outside of the sitting-room door.

“MY OWN DEAR MARY,—I am only gone to see my mother. You said I was to obey her, and she’s sent for me. But I shall come back to-night unless she sends for *you*.—Your loving GREVILLE.”

He thought this would be a better place than anywhere else, as Mary would be sure to see it at once, and it would relieve her mind before she went inside and missed him. And, as they lived on the top floor none of the other inmates of the house would pass and read it.

Little did the poor boy guess that Mrs. Sweech was employing herself in those few seconds in rifling

Mary's workbox of its treasures, Greville's little shirt and baby-clothes, as proofs of his identity ; or that these few words, scrawled in his boyish hand, would rend Mary's tender and devoted heart !

she was cunning enough, experienced enough, to know exactly how to keep up the appearance of a kind, motherly woman arguing with a naughty and wilful child, now coaxing, now chiding, and all in the most kindly and motherly tones, as she dragged him along, without any outward semblance of more violence than was necessary.

"Oh, let me go! Let me go back! I don't know who you are; I don't know where you are taking me! My mother isn't here, I'm sure. Let me go back to Mary!" cried Greville, gasping out the words in jerks as he hurried on.

"Now, now, do be a good child, there's a dear," said Mrs. Sweech, taking care that her own deep-voiced entreaties and upbraidings should drown the boy's words. "Don't go and let all the neighbours see as you're a naughty boy as won't do as you're told. But come quietly and don't give no more trouble. There's a dear child! Oh, fie, don't be so naughty!"

The passers-by took little notice. As the artful old woman well knew, the sight of a refractory small boy is too common a one to excite either interest or suspicion.

On they went, therefore, in this uncomfortable manner, until, taking a sharp turn into a dark little back street, where the buildings were chiefly backs of shops and warehouses, she lifted him off his feet, plunged down a narrow alley, gagging him dexter-

ously with an end of her shawl to silence his cries, and taking a key from her pocket, unlocked a door on her right.

"Keep still, lovey," cooed she in the sweetest of voices, while Greville screamed and tried in vain to utter more than a muffled noise; "we shall be there in a moment now!"

And the next moment she had opened the door, and putting the boy on his feet gave him a violent push which sent him flying three or four yards along a dark, narrow passage, where he was thrown against the wall, stumbled, and fell.

In a moment she had shut the outer door and was close upon him.

"Hold your noise, or I'll scrag yer!" growled she between her set teeth, as she gave the prostrate boy a vicious kick. "And get up—get up, I say, and let me come past."

The frightened boy rose hastily, without uttering another sound; and Mrs. Sweech, brushing past him quickly, opened another door, and seizing him roughly, dragged him into an empty room, which smelt damp and close. There was only a little light let in by one dusty window, but by this Greville saw the woman raise a trap-door in the boards in one corner of the room.

Guessing that it was her intention to put him down under the floor through this opening, the boy could not repress a low cry of alarm.

Leaving the trap-door open, Mrs. Sweech crossed the floor again with great rapidity, clutched the boy by the hair, and dragged him along to the opening, beneath which he just descried the top of a flight of rough wooden steps.

"Now then, down yer go, and don't yer make no more noise than you can help," cried she, as she gave him a push which nearly sent him headlong down into the stone cellar below.

Greville shuddered. He saw that he was helpless in the hands of this hag, and with the terrible, tragic submission of childhood, he obeyed her savage order and went stumbling down.

The air of the cellar struck cold and damp. There was a little light thrown down into it through a grated opening close to the roof, and by this he could see that there were a quantity of half-full sacks in the place, and some things in the middle of the floor which he presently made out to be a broken chair, and a couple of boxes placed one on the top of the other to form a table.

On this table were a piece of newspaper, a candle in a bottle, and a second bottle.

In one corner there stood a second broken chair with a pail of water on it, a torn towel, and a piece of broken looking-glass.

And that completed the furniture of the horrible place.

As his eyes became accustomed to the dim light,

Greville saw that down the wall, under the narrow grating, there were green and black marks of damp and mildew. He stared about him with eyes full of terror, but without a movement. In his heart there was but one thought : would Mary discover him—in time ?

Suddenly he felt a blow in the back which sent him staggering, and Mrs. Sweech's voice—the natural one now—no longer sugary and coaxing, but hoarse, strident, brutal, said—

“ Don't stand there looking as if you was stuck. There ain't nothin' the matter with yer, 'cept impudence ! I'm sure you've made my arm ache ever so, carrying a great hulking boy like you along, jest 'cos you didn't choose ter walk, and a-cryin' out and a-tryin' to make people think I was a ill-treating of yer ! ”

“ What have you brought me here for ? Who are you ? ” asked Greville, in a low, timid voice.

“ Don't you arst no questions an' you won't get told no lies. I brought you 'ere for your own good, you may depend upon that, jest to get you out of the sickening, psalm-singing ways you've got into with that there Mary as you're always a-talking of,” said Mrs. Sweech, severely. “ An' if yer behave yerself we shall get along, an' you'll be as right as ninepence ; but if you don't choose to do as you're bid, and if we 'ave any more screaming or kicking, or anythink of that sort, why, I'll knock yer 'ead

against that wall as soon as look at you. So there—now you know!”

She spoke in a sullenly brutal tone, but with less ferocity than she had shown at first. Passing in front of him, she now went to the improvised table, put down the newspaper bundle in which she had hastily rolled up Greville's little baby-clothes, felt for the matches, and lit the candle. Then she opened the newspaper parcel which had been lying on the boxes, took out a piece of bread and some crumbs of cheese, and began munching.

The moment she turned her back to him Greville, in a paroxysm of desperate energy, the result of despair, ran up the wooden steps and thumped at the door with all his might.

“Help, help!” cried he, his shrill, childish voice echoing through the cellar. “Somebody come and help me! Somebody come and let me out!”

With a sudden change from mere sullenness to savagery, Mrs. Sweech rushed at the ladder and dragged the boy roughly down.

“Ah, yer would, would yer, yer little snivelling beast! You would cry out and make a row, and git yerself an' me inter trouble, would yer? Then take that—and that!” As she spoke she hit him twice sharply with her heavy hand. He drew his breath sharply through his teeth, but did not cry out. This self-restraint exasperated the amiable lady. “What, you won't cry out, won't yer? You

can hold your tongue when yer like, can yer? Why don't yer make a row now?" She snatched up an end of rope which was lying among the lumber on the floor and gave him a sharp cut across the shoulders with it. He flinched, but uttered no sound. "Why don't yer cry out now, eh? Now you've got something to cry for."

The boy gulped down a sob.

"It isn't manly to cry, Mary says so," said he in a strangled voice.

"Oh, Mary says that, does she?" retorted Mrs. Sweech, aiming at him another blow which, however, he now had experience enough to avoid. "Look 'ere, young man, I'm sick of hearin' of yer everlasting Mary, Mary, so I tell yer. An' next time you mention her name you'll get a clout over the 'ead—d'ye 'ear?" No answer. She spoke louder—"Do you hear, or shall I make yer?" and she made another grab at him.

"Yes, I hear," said Greville, almost inaudibly.

Mrs. Sweech uttered a grim laugh.

"Ah, I thought as you'd 'ear that time!" cried she ferociously. "I'll break yer spirit, my fine feller, before I've done with yer! You're not the first of your sort I've 'ad to deal with, I can tell you!" She looked at the table, and then spoke more quietly. "Now look 'ere, I don't want to 'ave no scenes. I wants to sit down and read my noos-paper and my letters, and to 'ave a mite of bread

and cheese quiet. You've got to set there," and she pointed to a heap of sacks under the wall, "while I do. And don't you dare for to move or to squeal out, 'cos if yer do I'll strangle yer!"

Greville was moving slowly in the direction pointed out to him when Mrs. Sweech jumped up impatiently and threw him down among the sacks.

"Just you be a little more spry when you're told to do a thing, if you want you and me to be friends!"

The boy, who had been hurt by contact with the stone wall against which he had fallen, sat up on the sacks and held his head in his hands. He was dazed and sick, and his head ached. He was for the moment past acute feeling.

Satisfied that he was "safe" for a few minutes, his tender guardian seated herself on the broken chair, took out her spectacles and put them on, nibbling bread and cheese the while, and produced a telegram from her pocket.

She looked, as she sat in the candle-light carefully spelling out the viscount's message, the picture of a motherly old soul, born to be the kind protectress of helpless infancy.

Even poor little Greville was conscious of this as he presently ventured to raise his head and looked wonderingly at her face. Was it possible that this benevolent-looking old woman was the creature

who had so savagely assaulted him, and whose designs upon him he could not contemplate without a shudder ?

Poor little Greville only felt these things without a definite thought. His childish mind was overwhelmed by the calamity which had so unexpectedly befallen him ; and he was stunned by the awful blow.

Mrs. Sweech, meanwhile, read the telegram which she had received from Lord Shelvin on the previous day at Bristol, and then a letter which he had sent to her by hand before leaving the course. This epistle she had much difficulty in spelling out ; but she managed it at last, as she went on nibbling her bread and cheese. On receipt of it the day before, soon after the arrival of the telegram which bade her find out a "person named Tippetts," she had only mastered the sense of it before starting for London. Now it was time, she thought, to study its contents more seriously.

"Dear Mrs. Sweech," the letter, which was written in a hasty scrawl, began—

"Circumstances have given you such an insight into my family affairs, and I have such a regard for your cleverness and integrity, that I think I cannot do better than take you into my confidence, and ask you to help me in a certain difficult matter which has just come to my ears."

"No, he can't do no better than that, suttingly,"

chuckled Mrs. Sweech to herself when she came to that point.

Greville looked at her and listened in horror. What a pleasant laugh it seemed, to come from such a woman !

She went on reading the letter, slowly and with difficulty—

“I have reason to suspect that an attempt is about to be made to palm off upon a certain lady, a child who is represented to be the one she threw into the water, in a fit of mental aberration, seven years ago. A disreputable young man, known by the nickname of Tippets, is mixed up in this attempt. If you can trace him out and bring to me the child in question, or proof of his death, if he is dead——”

At this point in the reading of the letter Mrs. Sweech looked up, glanced at Greville out of the corner of her eyes, and chuckled again.

“Or proof of his death if he is dead,” she repeated to herself in a ghoulish whisper. “Aye, that’s what my lord wants,” muttered she to herself, “proof as the kid is dead.”

And she went on reading—

“ . . . you may rest assured that your services will be rewarded in the handsomest manner.”

Here she stopped, laughed again, and nibbled her bread and cheese.

“So I should think ! So I should think !” muttered she to herself, shrewdly. “The shovin’ a one side

of the little hobstickle to your enjoyin' of a title and a fortin which ain't yours at all—why, that's the sort of service wot people expects to 'ave to pay 'andsome for."

And she stumbled along the concluding lines—

"I enclose your fare to London, and will settle with you for all expenses when I see you."

Mrs. Sweech folded the letter carefully and put it in the front of her dress.

"Purty frank, that letter is. I'll take care of it. It may come in 'andy for gettin' a fiver now and again, when I'm 'ard up. 'Is lordship must 'ave been at the champagne when he wrote so frank as that," thought she to herself. "Now let's see. If I was to bring that there child to 'im alive, I s'pose I shouldn't get much thanks; but if I brought proof that 'e was dead——" She took off her spectacles and felt about for the last crumbs of cheese. "Why, it ought to mean a matter of two or three 'underd pound; and I'll do it too," muttered she fiercely. "I'd like to do it!" and she shook her fist at Greville, whose head was again buried in his hands. "Ever since the time when the little beast went and lorst hisself, jest to git me inter trouble, and to lose me the twenty pound I might 'a got for 'm, I've 'ated even the memory of 'im like p'ison; and now I've got 'im, got 'im 'isself!" and she ground her teeth. "I'll do it, yes, I'll do it," she muttered again; and as she spoke, she seized the black bottle on the table, and

put it to her lips. The next moment, however, she put it down again in disgust.

"Not a blessed drop left. I must have been thirsty last night. These little affairs do make a body awful dry ; and not a 'apenny to buy myself a quatern," wailed she, as she searched her pockets.

She took up the parcel which contained the tiny underclothes which Greville had worn on the night Mary found him. "I daren't pop these 'ere," she murmured sorrowfully. "I'll have to show 'em to 'is lordship as proofs of hidentication." A thought struck her : she turned and looked at Greville. "There's the clothes 'e's got on," she muttered half aloud. "Wery nice, and nearly noo by the looks on 'em."

She rose and went over to the boy, who started and shrank.

"'Ere, wot are you a-squirmin' for ?" cried she in rough good humour. "Let's 'ave a look at yer !" and she pulled him roughly to his feet. "My, you are smart !" she went on, in ironical admiration. "Goes to a fash'nable tailor by the looks of yer. Wot's 'is name, eh ?"

Under pretence of looking for the tailor's name, she had already torn off the boy's coat, which she was now inspecting in the candle-light.

"Mary made it," said Greville, timidly.

"Wot ! Not go to a tailor yet !" cried Mrs. Sweech, in affected astonishment. "Well, then, it's

time yer did. 'Ere, whip off yer weskit, and I'll take the two round for a pattern to a shop I know, and they'll rig yer up a real swell in a jiffy."

But Greville held his arms tightly across his chest.

"Oh, no, don't, please. I like these things best," he pleaded.

But Mrs. Sweech had already seized him, and had stripped up the buttons of his waistcoat at one pull.

"Why, wot's this in the pocket?" cried she, as some money rattled in her hands. "Sixpence, and a shillin', and a 'andful o' coppers! You little miser, you! Why didn't you put them in the mishingary box a-Sunday? Well, never mind," added she, as she slipped the money into her own pocket, "I'll put it in for yer. I'm dead nuts on mishingaries, I am." With which ferocious pleasantry she was hurrying to the door, when suddenly she changed her mind, and, picking up the piece of rope which was lying on the floor, she proceeded to tie his hands behind him, and to secure him to a ring in the stone wall.

Greville, stung with tenfold horror, begged her hoarsely to leave him free.

"Don't tie me up, don't tie me up," implored he, frantically. "If you leave me free, I promise not to cry out—on my word of honour!"

But this speech infuriated Mrs. Sweech.

"Word of honour!" cried she, growling and shaking him. "Ugh! I'm sick of yer cant about

word of honour. As if yer was so much better than anybody else. Now you won't get away," cried she, as she drew him to the iron ring, and fastened his hands so tightly that the cord cut his wrists, "word of honour or no word of honour"; and as for hollering out, why, we'll stop that too." She seized an empty sack, and standing on the broken chair, reached up to the grating, and stuffed the sack into the aperture. "Now, my fine feller, you can holler yer heart out, and you won't get no good by it, nor me no 'arm."

She had got to the ladder by this time, and she turned round at the top to say—

"But look'ee 'ere : I shall listen at the door when I come back, and if I 'ear anythink goin' hon inside, why, I'll pay yer out in a way yer won't forget, word of honour, my gentleman, word of honour."

With which valedictory address, uttered in a hissing whisper which chilled the poor boy's blood, Mrs. Sweech took herself off, carefully locking the door of the cellar behind her, and carrying off the key.

For the first moment Greville felt her absence to be a relief ; the next, he felt that even the presence of the hag was better than this awful, deadly silence. Was she going to leave him there to starve ? Would she never come back ? Should he die there of cold and hunger, and of the deadly terror which set his limbs shaking and his teeth chattering ?

Greville did not know. His brain was full of confused and horrible thoughts. One smothered, sobbing whisper—"Mary! oh, Mary!" burst from his lips, and then, with difficulty, cutting his poor wrists with the rope, and hurting his knuckles against the stone wall, he contrived to get down on his knees.

"Oh, God, help Mary to find me," prayed the poor child, while the scalding tears ran down his cheeks.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE EMPTY NEST

NOW Messrs. Dowells and Snode were experts in detective work ; so they found no difficulty in shadowing Mary and Jack, when these two left the racecourse together.

Jack felt, with Mary, that, chance having opened a way towards the recognition of Greville's claim to his father's title and property, they must now push on boldly with it, even at the risk of danger to the child.

After all, they knew what sort of person they had to deal with in the usurping viscount. They knew that they must be on their guard ; and fate having prepared the way by his strange and unexpected meeting with his own mother, the boy would, they felt, never have such another chance of establishing his true position as was now offered by a mere coincidence.

Mary had lost sight of Tippetts, who was on the course ; but she dared not wait about on the chance

of meeting him again. She had been struck with fear on recognising Lord Shelvin's venal agents, and she felt that their presence portended ill for her boy. Nothing would satisfy her but to return to town immediately ; and Jack Mallory, after explaining to his brother that he had been called away, met her before she reached the railway station.

They had to wait a little while for their train, as it was too early for the return traffic from the course to have begun. Jack walked up and down the platform beside her, as, enveloped in the long black cloak she wore to hide her fancy dress, she paced up and down with impatient footsteps.

She had taken off the little black mask, and had exchanged her pierrette's hat for a simple black, close-fitting bonnet. Jack thought, as he took her mandoline from her, and smiled down at her, that her dress looked like that of a nurse, and her face like that of an angel.

“Why are you so impatient, so anxious ?” asked he gently, with the old kindly ring in his voice which thrilled Mary as it had done nearly seven years before. “Everything is going on well. You have seen his mother, moved her, persuaded her to recognise her child ; and I think, since his likeness to his family seems to be so great, that you will have no difficulty at all in proving his identity.”

“What have you heard, then ?” asked Mary quickly.

"I've heard all about yesterday's doings on the course. The coachman heard all that passed, and saw General Burwood, an old friend of my old master's, pick up the child and point out his white lock—the Garrington lock. So the story got down to the servants' hall last night, and now it's all over the place that Lady Liliass's child was not drowned after all, and that he's turned up again. So you see the way's prepared."

"Where is Lady Liliass living, then?"

"She's taken a house in town for the season. She was going abroad to-morrow; but now she's changed her mind, and she's going to Drake's Hall to-night. I suppose it is to consult the old lady, the young master's grandmother. I came up last night to see our mare run, and I heard all this from the men-servants."

"And Captain Garrington, where's he staying?"

"At Drake's Hall. He's getting to the end of his tether in town, by what I hear, what with debts and difficulties of one kind or another, so he's been living rather quietly—for him."

"Drake's Hall! And that's where I shall have to take my boy," murmured Mary, dubiously.

"It'll be all right, never fear. There's plenty of us to look after him," said Jack, reassuringly; "and old Lady Shelvin's not so much eaten up in her nephew as she used to be. You find out a thing or two in seven years."

"Ah!" cried Mary, relieved. "I'm glad to know that."

"So that you can really take things quietly," went on Jack, in a persuasive voice, "and not get into a fever about it, as I can see you are doing."

"I can't help it!" cried she, as she turned round quickly, and looked up earnestly in his face. "I can't help trembling for the boy's safety whenever he is out of my sight. I can't help wondering whether these wretches of the Captain's will get hold of him before I can get back to him. Ah!" cried she, with a blush, as Jack smiled, "I know it's silly, but think what that boy has been to me all these years; think how my very life is bound up in him, so that I seem only to have come into the world when I first met him!"

"And I believe you did," replied Jack, with sudden gravity and earnestness. "I believe that the real Mary, the real, true, tender, lovely woman I've thought about all these years, did come into existence on that October night when she first took up the little lost boy in her kind arms."

Mary trembled at his words, and at the tone in which they were uttered; a tone which told her, more plainly than any words could have done, that she was nearer to his heart than ever. After a pause she said quickly—

"How did you know me, Mr. Mallory, under the mask? After all this time."

"I knew you because I've been thinking of you, and longing to see you, for six years and more," replied Jack, simply.

"But I must have changed in six years."

"So you have—tremendously," said he, promptly. "You've grown more beautiful. I can see more of your soul shining through your eyes than I could seven years ago. Seven years ago, as you know, I could take 'No' for an answer from you; now, Mary, I can't." She started and drew back, but he followed her, and went on in a low, earnest voice, "Listen, Mary. We're going back to your lodging now, and we're going to take the young master to his home; and when we give him to his people again you are to remember that you've got another duty in life to take the place of the old: you've got to reward the constancy of the man who's loved you seven years."

It was a strange place for a declaration of love, the platform of a railway station, with groups of people collecting on both sides of the line. But it did well enough for Jack, whose quiet manner and low voice attracted no attention, and for Mary, who listened with downcast head, and with a strange new happiness in her heart that struggled with her anxiety on her boy's account.

When their train came up they got in together, and scarcely spoke on the journey. But whenever their eyes met, Jack saw in Mary's a look which told

him that he would not be repulsed this time, as he had been seven years ago. She still pretended to be hard ; she had still shaken her head, and begged him not to talk of such things, when he told her what was in his heart ; but it was all the veriest pretence, so that when they reached the house where she lodged, and went together up the stairs, Jack overtook her at the top of the first flight, and, without asking leave, put his arm round her and gave her a long kiss.

But Mary shivered, though she did not resist him. Even in the excitement of this, the first kiss from the man she loved, she could not forget her anxiety about Greville. It had already struck her as strange that she had not seen the boy's face watching for her return from the front window of their little home.

She freed herself as quickly as she could, and ran upstairs.

Outside her door she stopped short, with a sort of sob. She had caught sight of the paper pinned upon the door, and recognised Greville's childish handwriting even before she had mastered the words upon it.

The next moment Jack, who was just behind, was startled by a cry which seemed to come from the very depths of a broken heart. She turned to him with an ashen face. Before she went a step farther she knew the truth ; knew that her boy was gone—stolen.

"What is it? What's the matter, dear?" asked Jack, in alarm.

Pointing with a shaking finger to the paper, which she had torn from the door, Mary gasped out hoarsely—

"He's gone, gone, gone! They've got him; they've got my boy! Oh, I shall go mad—mad!"

And with a long, shivering sigh, Mary, escaping from the kind arm which was stretched out to comfort her, opened the door with hands wet with fear, and staggered into the room.

Poppy, who was on her knees in the middle of the floor, peeping under the tablecloth, started up with a shrill scream.

"Have you got him? Oh, did you meet him?" cried she, in an agitated voice.

Mary flew at her like a tigress, so that Poppy cowered and tried to run away. But Mary was too much overwhelmed with grief to be angry—with the stupid girl, at least. Seizing her by the shoulder, and staring into her eyes, she asked, in a voice which was scarcely audible—

"Tell me, tell me—who has taken him? Who was it, I say? Who?"

"Oh, don't, don't look at me like that," wailed Poppy, who was indeed in the deepest distress. "I don't think he can have come to no harm, I don't, indeed. She was such a nice old lady——"

Mary interrupted her by a low cry.

"Lady? What was she like—what was she like?" asked she, with a horrible suspicion of the truth.

"Oh, she was the nicest old dear, a friend of Tippetts, and she come up to town a-purpose to tell him as he'd been left a fortin. Of course, it mayn't be true——"

Mary broke in, with a wild, hoarse laugh—

"True! Oh, could you be taken in so easily? How could you, after what I'd said?" She turned round to Jack, with wild eyes. "It's Mrs. Sweech!" cried she, panting with an awful fear, "and if we don't find him, if we can't get him away from her, my boy won't be allowed to live through the night." She did not wait for an answer, but turned again and seized the frightened Poppy by the arm. "Tell me how long ago they went, and which way!" panted she, as she dragged the unhappy and contrite girl to the door.

With trembling lips poor Poppy said that the woman had got rid of her for a minute, and that on her return she and the boy had disappeared. Poppy added that she had not been away ten minutes, and that they could not have gone out by the front way, as she herself had been just outside the door, looking up and down the street for Mary, during the whole time that she was absent from the room.

Mary herself was in a state of agitation so terrible that she was incapable of connected thought, and

it was Jack who took upon himself to devise a plan of action. He dispatched Mary at once to Paddington, putting her into a hansom, and telling her to get to Drake's Hall as quickly as she could, as the child would probably be taken there. He did not share her worst suspicions; he thought that Mrs. Sweech, having by some means got on the track of the child, intended to get a reward from the mother for taking him back to her.

But in the meantime he set out with Poppy and with Tippetts, who had also returned from Epsom, to try to track out the old woman. They went out by the back way, at Poppy's suggestion, and, as the old woman had not got a very long start, they were lucky in getting information from people they passed, which helped them on their way.

A respectable-looking old woman with a pretty boy had been seen, and had been noticed on account of the reluctance of the child to do as he was told.

This was a good beginning, but the difficulties in the way of the pursuers were still great. At each turning they came to they divided, and Jack asked the people on one side of the road, while Tippetts and Poppy interrogated those on the other. In this way it was inevitable that they should lose much precious time before they got on the right track.

In the meantime poor Greville was going through tortures of suspense and fear. It seemed a long

time that he was left alone in the cellar after Mrs. Sweech's departure. He called for help until his voice was hoarse, and was amazed, after the manner of children, to find what a weak thread of a thing his voice was when he put forth the utmost strength of his lungs in his dire need.

Then at last he heard a sound, a footstep, and his heart beat fast, and his breath grew laboured, in his frantic hope that help might be coming at last.

With a great throb of bitter disappointment he recognised the voice of Mrs. Sweech, as she stumbled about above, and fumbled for the trap-door.

And he knew, before he saw her reappear, that she was tipsy.

When she at last got the trap-door open, and began to descend, he thought at first that she would fall off the ladder on to the stone floor. But she paused a moment when she had shut down the lid of the trap-door, and steadied herself a little before undertaking the descent.

It alarmed the child more than ever to see that her libations had had a bad effect upon her temper.

"Drat the steps!" she muttered to herself, in a thick, husky voice, as she proceeded cautiously down. "Not fit for a lady to go down, that they ain't! Not fit! No!" she repeated loudly.

As she reached the bottom she missed a step, staggered backwards, fell against the boxes which

made the table, and knocked over the candle, which was promptly extinguished.

"Drat it!" cried she furiously. "Where's the matches? If I 'avn't gone and 'urt my foot now! Where's brat, I wonder? I did leave 'im 'ere, I'll swear!" She stopped, and he could hear her heavy breathing.

"Boy!" cried she.

Greville was silent, and held his breath. The light had faded; Mrs. Sweech was not in a condition to see very clearly; and he, fortunately, was under the grating, where the faint light which came through a crack above the sack she had stuffed between the bars did not fall on him.

He heard her fumbling about, overturning the chair, still feeling for the matches.

"Drat the matches!" cried she at last. "Sh'pose the rats 'ave eaten 'em! And drat the boy too! P'r'aps the rats 'ave eaten 'im too. 'T any rate, won't worry myself any more about him at present. Can't 'ave got away. I think I'll 'ave a little snooze. Sure I deserve it. Been workin' 'ard enough."

And, grumbling and grunting to herself, Mrs. Sweech lurched about the room, to the great terror of Greville, who was afraid she would light upon him by accident, until she fell upon some of the sacks; and then, with a groan, she settled herself to sleep.

The boy drew a long breath. It was an awful

thing to be shut in there with the drunken woman, in terror as to what her next act towards him would be. But he was getting so benumbed with the cold, being only in his little shirt and knickerbockers, that when once the terror of her moving presence was taken away, he almost forgot his fears in his physical miseries.

His teeth began to chatter, he could not keep still, and he feared that his involuntary movements might wake her and betray his presence. At last he grew so sick and faint with pain and wretchedness that he felt he could bear it no longer. He thought he would call out to her, try to wake her, and then appeal to her compassion and her avarice.

"I'll ask her if she ever had a little boy of her own, and to be kind to me because of him," thought the poor little fellow. "Mary says the thought of their own children makes women kind to other children. And then, if she won't be different because of that, I'll promise her the money Mary put in my money-box—the sovereign and the half-sovereign, and the five shillings and six-pence."

Even after his experience of the woman's tender mercies, the boy felt that the promise of so much wealth must be tempting to the creature who could steal his very clothes for a few pence. So he raised his head, and called out, in a voice which was strangely weak and faint and tremulous—

"Oh, ma'am, please wake up ; please untie me ; I've got something to tell you !"

And then his little heart felt as if it must burst with gladness. For there was a noise above, outside the grating ; the sack fell down, and a voice which he knew to be that of Tippetts cried—

"It's 'im, praise the Lord, it's 'im !"

"Tippetts !" shrieked the child, "Tippetts ! Oh, oh, oh, I'm so glad ! I—I—shall d—d—die !"

With an oath and a sleepy exclamation, Mrs. Sweech rolled off the sacks on which she had been lying, and stood up. The sound of blows on the bars of the grating made her look up. With a savage exclamation she rushed at the child.

"Tippetts, eh ? It was you a-callin' Tippetts, eh ?" cried she, in a fierce whisper. "You won't do 'ere, young man ! You're too much in the way of bad companions 'ere, so come along !"

She had unfastened the cord which bound him, with great agility, and was dragging him across the floor. Greville shrieked and struggled.

"Tippetts, Tippetts, she's got me again !"

"Yes, and I mean to keep you," cried the hag, as she snatched him up, and, gagging his mouth with her rough hand, pulled him up the ladder.

Fear had sobered her, and she got up with marvellous speed. Greville was speechless, gasping for breath.

Just, however, as Mrs. Sweech reached the top of

the ladder with him, the first bar of the grating gave way with a crash under the blows which were being dealt upon it from the outside. And Tippetts, who was as slight as a boy of twelve, was through and on the cellar floor in a moment, while Jack Mallory's deep voice encouraged him from the outside.

"Go for her ! Quick !"

Tippetts did "go" for Mrs. Sweech. But that good lady was quicker even than he.

Realising that it was impossible for her to escape with her prize, and determined at all costs to get off with a whole skin, the hag, on reaching the top of the ladder, threw the boy down into the cellar below, got through to the floor above, slammed down the lid of the trap-door, and made her escape out of the room, locking the door behind her.

Nobody attempted to follow.

Tippetts had caught the shuddering boy in his arms, and was hanging over him, with the tender solicitude of a woman. Jack having, with a well-aimed blow, forced in another bar of the grating with the heavy pickaxe which he had borrowed from a workman at the end of the street, had managed to squeeze himself through the aperture in his turn, while Poppy clapped her hands hysterically in the street above.

The sight of his old master's son in this pitiable condition unmanned the sturdy gamekeeper. He took the boy tenderly up, and whimpered—

"My old master's child ! Thank God, we've saved him ! We've saved him !"

Greville, who had for a moment half lost consciousness, looked up with a gleam of returning intelligence, when he felt the reviving warmth of the coat which Jack took off himself to put round the boy.

"I know you ! I know who you are !" whispered he in a faint voice. "You're Jack !"

And he threw his arms round the gamekeeper's neck, shivering with untold joy.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE OLD LOVE

MARY'S interview with Lady Liliass on the race-course had produced immediate results. The passion and fervour she had shown, her eager pleading, had conquered the reserve and timidity which had grown into a confirmed habit of mind with the late Lord Shelvin's unhappy widow.

The poor lady confessed to Mary that she had felt sure, the moment she saw Greville, that he was her child; and she added that his likeness to his late father was so strong that nobody who knew the family could doubt that the child was a Garrington. Her reluctance to acknowledge him had been based, as Mary had guessed, solely upon her fear of the present Lord Shelvin, the child's cousin, who, she felt sure, would never suffer the boy to enjoy the position he himself had usurped.

Mary, however, had encouraged her, had persuaded her to confide in old Lady Shelvin, and to consult her lawyer. And both these things Lady Liliass had promised to do.

The poor lady, fearing that hesitation or delay would be fatal to her own resolution, left the racecourse and returned to town almost as soon as Mary herself had done. And, driving straight to Paddington, she arrived at Drake's Hall that very night, anxious to get the business over as fast as possible.

It was too late, however, to disturb old Lady Shelvin that night; and on the following morning, before that lady was visible, Lady Liliass learned that two gentlemen had come to the house, and had begged that she would see them, early as it was, on a matter of great importance.

One of the gentlemen was General Burwood, the man who had called attention to the boy on the racecourse; and the other would not give his name.

It was in the West Saloon that Lady Liliass received them. The bright April sunlight was strong in the room which had once been her prison, and in which she now spent most of her time in voluntary seclusion, when the two visitors were ushered in. Lady Liliass was sitting at the very window through which she had once heard from Jack Mallory the news that her child was alive. The high chair in which she sat, with its carved back of interlaced vine-leaves, made a striking background to her golden hair and her pale but still lovely face.

She held out her hand, with a faint smile, to her husband's old friend; and then she glanced at his companion.

In a moment her face changed. Looking at him intently, as her lips uttered a low cry, she suddenly gave way, and burst into tears.

“Geoffrey !”

She had gone through too much in the last few hours to bear unmoved this last surprise of the unexpected sight of her old lover.

“Lilias !” was all he could say.

General Burwood, affected himself by the emotion he witnessed in both of them, withdrew to one of the windows, to give them time to recover themselves.

“You are not angry with me for coming ?” said the young man at last, in a low voice. “It’s about the child—your boy ! I shouldn’t have dared to come but for that. General Burwood came down to Gillingham yesterday, to see your father about this boy you saw on the racecourse. And as the earl knew that I had brought a woman up to the Towers, years ago, with a child she said was—was yours, he thought my testimony might be of use. You—you forgive me for coming ?”

“I thank you,” said Lady Lilias, who had risen, and moved away for a few moments to recover herself.

And she turned towards him with new life in her manner, with a new spirit in her eyes.

After a moment’s hesitation, he held out his hand to her without speaking. Her breath came quickly ;

she seemed to read in this action something more than a mere handshake of two friends. And she was right. For the moment her thin white hand lay in his, she saw something like a flash of fire in his gentle blue eyes. His breath came fast, and the hand which held hers trembled.

She drew hers away—very gently.

“You have come about—my boy?” whispered she.

At these words the old General, who had had his back discreetly turned, thought that he might without indiscretion come back again.

“My dear lady,” said he, as he came up to her, and raised an impressive forefinger to emphasise his words, “you must forgive me for hurrying on in this matter, without consulting you. But I’m convinced the affair is too serious and important a one for delay. I went to your father yesterday, and I have come to-day to entreat you to write to your lawyers immediately. If that child you saw on the course the day before yesterday isn’t the missing boy, I’ll never believe the evidence of my own eyes again!”

But Lady Lilius began to tremble, and to clasp and unclasp her hands in desperate agitation.

“I know he’s my child, I know it; I’m sure of it!” cried she, in a hoarse and broken voice. “I saw the woman who’s had charge of him all these years, and she told me the whole story, and I

believed every word. But remember"—as she spoke the strength returned to her voice, and the dignity to her carriage, as she looked from the one to the other, and spoke with passionate entreaty—"remember that I have a right to be afraid. Remember that I was right before, when I insisted that my child was alive, and nobody would believe me! Remember, too, that I've lived here all these years, and understand with whom we are dealing. And I say that it would be better for him to remain with this poor woman who is devoted to him, all his life, than to come here, where, by his father's will, he must come, exposed to the influences which would be round him here!"

The General shook his head.

"I do all justice to your feelings, but I do think you exaggerate the danger," said he gently. "I——"

"Of course you do," retorted Lady Lilius quickly, and almost shrilly. "Of course, as I have been doubted all these years, so the evidence of my own ears must be doubted still. I heard his uncle and those two wretches who do his work arrange for him to be got out of the way. If he was ready to murder—— Oh yes," cried she, stamping her foot as the General shook his head, "it was murder, murder they were planning! I say, if he was ready to murder my child then, before he had enjoyed the property which has never been his—what would he not do now rather than give it up? But, of

course, I am only a woman, only his mother, and my fears, my knowledge—do not count. I am a fool, they say. Nobody listens to me. Nobody believes me !”

And with a wail of despairing helplessness in her voice, Lady Liliás turned away and began to pace up and down the room.

The next moment she was stopped. For Geoffrey Wilmer, with his face full of emotion, had placed himself before her.

“I listen, and I believe you !” cried he, passionately. “And I say you are right, Liliás. Don’t acknowledge the boy yet. But have him sent down to Gillingham. I’ll take him, if your father will not. And let the lawyers work, and try to devise a plan by which the boy may be kept in safe hands, and yet allowed to take his right position.”

The poor lady’s face had grown soft and sweet and happy as she listened. But before she could open her lips to reply, there was a sharp knock at the door of the room, and in a moment the colour left her face, and she sank into a chair, lifeless, leaden of lip, cold of eye.

She knew the knock, and she was the only person in the room who was not surprised when the door was opened quickly, and Lord Shelvin came in.

“Well, Lady Liliás,” cried he, going up to her with outstretched hand, and with a buoyant and effusive manner, as he smiled and nodded to

General Burwood, and glanced curiously at Geoffrey Wilmer, "I have good news for you, the best of news. I've employed people in all directions to hunt up that boy we have heard so much about. And I have no doubt that he will be brought here in the course of the next forty-eight hours."

"Indeed!" cried General Burwood, frankly pleased at this alacrity, which, he thought, ought to dispose of Lady Liliass's suspicions. "You've lost no time, then?"

"I haven't, indeed. And if the child proves to be my cousin's son, I can truly say no one will be more pleased than I, in spite of the losses it will entail upon me!"

"Very honourably said!" cried the General. "And Lady Liliass ought to be grateful to you for acting so promptly."

He turned towards the lady, rather impatiently. But she made no answer. She was sitting back in her chair, like a statue, without a spark of expression in her eyes. About her curved lips there was a strange look, like the caricature of a smile. With a cold gesture of farewell she rose slowly, and left the room with the stiff, straight walk of an automaton.

CHAPTER XXX

LORD SHELVIN PREPARES A WELCOME

WHEN Jack Mallory found his old master's little son in the cellar where he had been imprisoned by Mrs. Sweech, he was seized with an awful fear lest the cold and exposure, the fright and the suspense to which the poor child had been subjected, should have inflicted some permanent injury upon the little lad.

He was so white, so cold, he shivered so piteously even as he lay in the gamekeeper's arms, that Jack decided the best thing he could do was to take him straight to a doctor's. And this he accordingly did.

Gently raising the boy to the grating which they had destroyed, Jack passed him through into the willing arms of Tippetts and Poppy in the street outside, and then followed himself. Poppy, who shed tears of joy on seeing Greville again, insisted on remaining with Tippetts in the neighbourhood of the cellar. The old woman was sure to come

back, she said, and then——. Miss Binks shook her fist and ground her teeth significantly.

So Jack left them both, and carried the boy to the house of the nearest doctor, who said that the child would get over the shock he had received in a day or two, and expressed the opinion that he had suffered no serious harm.

By that time the little fellow had already greatly recovered, thanks to the care of his new friend. And when he heard that he was to be taken down to Drake's Hall, where not only his mother was, but Mary also, his little face brightened, and he was eager to start on his journey.

Jack, however, did not dare to take him down without his having a night's rest first, after his terrible experiences. And, much as Jack was troubled by the fact that he would have to leave poor Mary a whole night in suspense, since he did not know where she would pass the night, and could not, therefore, send her a telegram, yet he was obliged to follow this course.

On the following morning, however, he took the child down to Bristol, and thence by cab to his own cottage. Little Greville, who had had a restless, uneasy night, was tired and sleepy, and Jack thought he would put him to rest in the cottage, to prepare him for the exciting meetings which were in store for him.

Now, although Jack looked upon his sister as a

silly and vain little chatterbox, not to be trusted with a secret, he had never had any idea of her relations with the viscount. Hannah was as artful as she was vain; and she knew well that, on the first hint of there being anything wrong in her conduct, her brother would have sent her away, or have taken her himself to another place.

The consequence was that he thought he could reckon upon her kindness towards his old master's child; and he was astonished, on returning to his cottage, and showing her the boy whom he still carried in his arms, to see her face cloud over with something like horror.

"Good gracious! Who's that you're bringing?" cried she, breathlessly, stopping in the middle of her work of kneading the dough for a pudding.

"Can't you see? Don't you know who it is, Hannah?" asked Jack, as he put his foot on a chair, and made the boy sit up on his knee. "Can you look twice at his face, and ask who it is? It's my old master's son. It's young Lord Shelvin!"

Hannah gave a cry of unaffected alarm.

"What! Him Lord Shelvin! Come to turn out my lord? Oh, why did you bring the child here? You'll only get us all into trouble, and get yourself the sack!" cried Hannah.

"Why, girl, what's the matter with you?" cried Jack, in his full, round voice. "Aren't you glad to think Lord Shelvin's son wasn't drowned after

all, and that poor Lady Liliass is to have her child back again?"

"Oh, it's all very well for her, and for the child. But what about poor Lord Shelvin left out in the cold?"

"He's had his innings," said Jack shortly. "He's enjoyed what's never been his own for seven years. It's time the rightful owner had a turn. I can't contain myself when I think what joy it will be when I take the young master up, and give him back to his mother!"

"You won't get so many thanks as you bargain for, it strikes me," said Hannah in a hard voice.

"Well, we shall see. Have you seen anything of a young lady? Has any one been here making inquiries?" he asked, with some constraint.

"Do you mean the theatre woman?" asked Hannah scornfully. "Oh, yes, she's been hanging about the place ever since last night. But only sneaking about, I believe, not daring to go up to the house."

"Of course she wouldn't without her boy," said Jack tenderly. "Well, I must go and find her now, and bring her back here, and relieve her mind. You'll wait here, won't you, Master Greville, till I bring Mary back to you?"

"Won't you take me with you?" cried the boy eagerly, as he clung to the hand of Jack, who had set him down on his feet.

"No, I won't drag you about with me now. You'd better rest a bit," said Jack kindly. "Here, come and lie down on the sofa. And perhaps you'll have a nap, and wake up fresh when Mary comes in."

He led the little fellow into the front sitting-room, wrapped him up warmly in a rug and a couple of blankets, and left him with a kindly smile.

"Look here, Hannah," said he gently to his sister, as he came back into the kitchen, and put his hand on her shoulder, "you must be kind to the poor child. He's gone through such things as would make you shudder. Promise me you'll be kind."

"Of course I will," replied Hannah rather pettishly. "Only I hope to goodness you won't leave him here long. It'll be a bad business this altogether, and the ruin of us all."

And, without waiting to hear more, she ran away in tears, and shut herself up in her own room; while Jack, rather ruefully, after another look at the boy, went quietly out of the house in search of Mary.

Hannah had not been in her room long when she was startled to hear a knock at the door of the house, and then the viscount's voice asking—

"Is any one at home?"

Pale and trembling, Hannah ran downstairs, and, stammering and staggering, intercepted him as he went towards the door of the sitting-room.

"Will you—will you come into the kitchen, my lord?" faltered she.

And she led the way, Lord Shelvin following her, into the big homely kitchen, which was the pleasantest part of the cottage.

"Look here," said the Viscount, in a loud and angry voice, "I want to know what that confounded brother of your's is up to. He was away last night, I know, and now he's been seen to come back. Has he brought anybody with him? Has he brought anybody with him, I say?" he repeated, in a louder voice, thumping the stone floor with his stick.

Hannah screamed; there was a cry from the adjoining apartment; and the next moment the door between the two rooms opened, and the startled Greville stood in the doorway.

On hearing the door open, Lord Shelvin turned sharply. At the sight of the child, with his unmistakable face, and the white "Garrington lock" falling over his forehead, the viscount uttered an oath, and sprang at him.

Hannah, with a low cry, rushed across and stood between the man and the boy.

"You mustn't touch him!" panted she, trembling.

"Touch him! Who wants to touch him?" asked Lord Shelvin irritably. "Not I, I'm sure. He's here now, and I must make the best of it. I

must take him up to his mother and grandmother. Come here, boy ? ”

He threw himself into one of the Windsor arm-chairs and held out his hand.

Greville came slowly across the room to him.

“What’s your name, eh ? ” asked Lord Shelvin, with a great show of kindness.

“Greville Garrington.”

A spasm crossed the viscount’s face, prepared as he must have been for this answer.

“And what have you come down here for ? ”

“To see Mary, and my mother.”

“And who is your mother ? ”

“Lady Liliashelvin,” answered Greville timidly.

“Well, Greville, I’m just going to see your mother, and I’ll take you back with me and introduce you,” said the Viscount, in a tone in which one of his listeners detected a slight tinge of mockery.

But Greville promptly turned away from him and edged nearer to Hannah.

“What, won’t you go ? ”

“No, thank you. Not with you.”

“And why not with me ? ” asked Lord Shelvin sharply.

The boy answered steadily, after a moment’s pause—

“I don’t know why. But—I won’t go with you.”

“Well, will you go with Hannah ? ”

"I—I would rather go with Mary, or Jack," answered Greville.

"But since you can't go with either of them," pursued the Viscount impatiently, "will you go with her?"

"Ye—es," said Greville hesitatingly.

Lord Shelvin jumped up.

"Very well, then. Go and wait in there for a minute." And he seized the child, pushed him into the front room, shut the door, and turned to the woman. "Look here, Hannah; you must put on your bonnet in about a quarter of an hour and bring the child up to the old well-house, where"—and he suddenly assumed a tone of tenderness which he had not previously used during his visit—"where you and I have so often met before. You'll be ready to meet me there again, won't you?"

Hannah, ready to be coaxed, and yet suspicious and alarmed, looked up at him out of the corners of her eyes.

"I'd meet you alone, there, or anywhere, Hugh," said she, venturing, for the first time for months, to use his Christian name, as had once been her privilege. "But—why must I bring the child?"

"Because I want to take him up to the house and give him to his mother. Don't you see," pursued he quickly, "that, since it has to be done, I want to have the credit of taking him up myself. Don't you see? It will make it better for me, won't it?"

This seemed plausible, and Hannah assented. Then she took the opportunity to speak a word on her own account.

"I suppose it was only concern about that brat of a child that brought you here, then? You never come and see me now of your own accord. You're tired of me, that's what it is. After all my devotion to you, and all my playing the spy for you as I've done."

"Oh, what nonsense," cried the Viscount impatiently. "Is this the time to worry me with such fancies, when I'm hemmed in with difficulties on all sides? If you're devoted, now's the time to prove it. Now is the time when, of all times, I want the affection, the help of a true friend. Hannah, my darling Hannah, you won't fail me now."

As he put his arm round her, Hannah, visibly affected and pleased, murmured timidly—

"You're sure the boy will come to no harm?"

"Harm! My dear girl, won't he be with you?"

"But why must I *meet* you with him? Why can't I take him with you now?"

"My dear girl," cried Lord Shelvin impatiently, "would it do for us to be seen leaving the cottage together?"

"Who's to see us? We've risked it many a time before?"

The viscount withdrew his arm impatiently and went towards the door.

"Oh, if you're in this mood, there's an end of it! I won't trouble you any longer."

"No, no, don't go like that," cried Hannah, subdued in a moment. "I'll go. I'll take him. I'll do whatever you wish, if only you'll speak nicely to me—if only you'll be a little kind, as you used to be."

"There's my darling girl," cried the viscount, turning promptly and putting his arm round her in one more hasty caress. "I thought she couldn't be quite so cold and hard as she pretended. In twenty minutes, then—at the old place. Run right in, dear, and wait for me inside, out of the sight of prying eyes; for the place is fuller of them than ever now."

He gave her a kiss and went rapidly out, waving his hand to her as she stood at the door, before he disappeared in the path through the woods.

The old well-house was a small thatched building, in the very heart of the wood which stretched between the gamekeeper's cottage and Drake's Hall. Here the viscount had often met Hannah in the old days when his passion for her was fresh, and later when his interests obliged him to keep on good terms with her.

She had become a burden to him lately with her peevish reproaches, her discontented, soured face, and her waning beauty. His was not a nature to cherish sentiment, and if he had not been anxious to keep Jack Mallory under his own eyes, he would

long ago have dismissed him and got rid of brother and sister at the same time.

Now he dashed through the wood at a great pace to the rendezvous, opened the clumsy door of the old well-house, and, taking out the heavy pocket-knife he always carried in the country, began tearing up the boards which had been placed over the mouth of the old well, which had now been for many years disused.

When he had finished this work he laid the boards across the mouth of the well, which was near the door of the little thatched building, in such a manner that the first step upon them would precipitate the intruder into the water which was still below.

This done, quickly and quietly, he came out of the building and sauntered away through the wood with his hands in his pockets.

CHAPTER XXXI

LORD SHELVIN IS RASH

OF all the unhappy-looking wretches that ever trod the earth, Dowells and Snode looked the unhappiest on the morning after the second day of the Spring Meeting at Epsom.

They had obeyed Lord Shelvin's injunction to follow Mary Gold, but their pursuit of her had, up to now, been a very unprofitable one.

First they had tracked her to the railway station, had seen her meet Jack Mallory, had followed her and Jack up to her lodgings in London.

They had seen her come out again, pale, scared, red of eyes, and get into a hansom which Jack called for her. And this sight worried them a good deal, for they knew well that it signified that the boy had disappeared, and that Mary was going in search of him.

Still there was no course open to them but to continue to follow the viscount's instructions, so they got into another cab and drove to Paddington in her wake.

They shadowed her again, found that she booked to Bristol, and did the same. Arrived there, they followed her to the residence of Mrs. Sweech, which was, however, shut up and for the time deserted. Then they followed Mary out to Drake's Hall, where the poor girl, after making inquiries of everybody she met, and learning that Lady Liliass had arrived, and then that Lord Shelvin had come, but that neither had brought any one with them, had spent the night in wandering about, not daring to announce herself to Lady Liliass without the child.

Dowells and Snode had, therefore, kept their eye on her all night, hiding about at the outskirts of the wood, and feeling very certain that if they followed the devoted woman they would end by lighting upon the child upon whose capture so much depended.

When morning came, however, and still no improvement was to be noted in the situation, the patience of Dowells gave way altogether.

They had watched Mary well into the morning as she sat on a stile leading out of a copse at the top of the hill, whence she could see the approach of any person who came to Drake's Hall. She had by this time seen Dowells, but neither his presence nor that of his partner affected her as long as they had not got the child with them. .

She had seen the cab drive up with two gentlemen, one of whom she recognised as the Geoffrey

Wilmer who had spoken to her so kindly at Gillingham on the occasion of her fruitless visit to The Towers six years before. She had even debated whether she should go down and waylay him, and tell him of what had happened.

But before she could carry this plan into execution he and his companion had entered the Hall.

Then she saw a little donkey-carriage go round to the front from the stables, and a very old lady get into it, and, attended by a maid on foot, begin to drive slowly through the grounds.

And still Jack Mallory did not come, and there was no sign of her boy.

For Mary had forgotten that there were two ways of coming from London to Drake's Hall. There was the way through Bristol, which was the only one she thought of ; and there was the way through Bath, which happened to be the route which Jack had chosen in order to avoid passing in front of Drake's Hall on the way to his own cottage.

For Jack, who could not know what was passing at the Hall, was afraid of the shock it might give to Lady Liliass if she saw her boy brought back to his home without any warning to her, after the suspense in which he believed her to be.

At last poor Dowells, who was sitting on a broken post on the edge of the wood, looking, in his rusty black clothes, like a dejected crow much out of condition, uttered a sort of groan, and, hopping

off his perch, made straight for a little patch of cultivated ground in the rear of the stables, the garden of one of the grooms.

"Here, what are you doing? You'll be seen," said Snode, who always kept better under cover than Dowells.

But Dowells, ramming his seedy hat down firmly upon his head, went straight on.

"I don't care if I am seen," growled he fiercely. "I can't starve. I must have food—food, I tell you—if it's only a carrot. I've had nothing to eat worth mentioning since midday yesterday!"

"Come, come," said Snode, going after his partner and taking him persuasively by the arm, "you've waited so long that you can well wait a little longer. Lord Shelvin said, 'Follow the woman'; and we must do it, if we don't mean to lose the result of all our trouble. See, she's moving."

And he pointed through the trees, which, with their sparse spring green, formed but an inefficient screen, at Mary, who had taken a few steps out into the open field, and was looking earnestly at the Hall.

"Let her move," groaned Dowells savagely. "I've followed that woman from the racecourse, where I had the wing of a fowl and a cork in my eye, to London, where I had a sandwich. I've followed her from London down here, where I've had nothing at all; and I've followed her about

these blessed grounds all the morning till the sight of the larder-window almost made a burglar of me. And now I won't follow her any longer till I've satisfied the cravings of hunger, whether I do it at my own expense, at yours, or at anybody else's."

Snode shrugged his shoulders, and, with a firm pressure which the other man knew better than to resist, held his arm and whispered quietly in his ear—

"Dowells, you're a confounded fool. If that boy gets taken to his mother, or if he gets kept away from his mother by anybody but us, we lose all the reward of our trouble."

"And if we get caught at this precious game it's a 'lifer' for both of us," said Dowells dismally.

His teeth were chattering with cold, his face was blue, and his spirits had sunk to their lowest ebb. Snode, who had twice his partner's courage, if he had also three or four times his rascality, gave him an impatient shake.

"We sha'n't get 'caught,' as you call it!" said he imperturbably. "Somebody else may get caught over this business, but not we."

Yielding to his partner's superior moral force, Dowells allowed himself to be dragged back into the shelter of the wood. But he was not silenced, neither was he convinced.

"Mr. Snode," said he, after a moment's pause, turning the very yellow whites of his bloodshot eyes

upon his companion, "this sort of thing ain't good enough for me! Here we've been wasting our time following a young woman who no more knows where the child is than we do ourselves."

"Possibly you're right, Mr. Dowells," said Snode drily.

"And as our pay was to be by result," went on Dowells, croaking out the words as well as a cold in the head would allow him, "and the result will be nothing, so the pay will be nothing, Mr. Snode."

But to this his partner replied by a soft chuckle.

"I think not," said he gently. "Knowing that the gallant viscount is rather a slippery customer, I have taken care to secure documents, letters, notes; trifles which seem nothing by themselves, but which, in the event of the disappearance of the child—and the child will disappear, I think—would prove of exceeding value to us."

"I see! Letters for the raising of blackmail," chuckled Dowells.

"Oh, dear, no," replied Snode, more drily than ever; "inducements to benevolence, that's all."

Roused to real admiration, which made him for the moment forget his personal discomfort, Dowells shook his partner by the hand.

"Mr. Snode, I honour you! You're a genius, Mr. Snode," bleated he.

"Sh—sh," said Snode.

He gripped his companion by the arm, and pointed

to a figure now to be seen emerging from the front entrance of the Hall.

It was the viscount himself. He turned at once to the left towards the wood where the two agents were concealed, and walking quickly, with his eyes on the ground, in a nervous, agitated manner, he dashed into the brushwood with rapid steps, without having seen either of them.

"I wonder," said Dowells in a thick whisper, "what he's up to?"

"I think," said Snode, "that we'll go and see. He wants quite as much watching as the woman."

So they crept back among the trees, keeping Lord Shelvin in sight all the time, until they saw him enter the gamekeeper's cottage. When he came out, looking much more agitated than before, and ashy white of face, the agents looked at each other, and Dowells, with one inflamed eye, slowly winked.

"What's happened now?" whispered he.

Snode, without answering, made him a sign to be quiet, and to follow again.

So they scrambled back again, tearing their clothes on brambles, and getting soaked with the dew on the evergreens, until they came in sight of the thatched well-house. They saw the viscount enter, they heard him at work inside; and Dowells winked at Snode again.

"This ought to be worth a bit to us, I think, Mr. Snode?" said he.

"I believe you," said Snode softly.

"I think," he went on presently, "we'll let him have the pleasure of meeting us when he comes out."

So they crossed the open space in front of the well-house quietly, and took up a position a little ahead, so that he would pass them on his way back to the Hall.

When he did come out of the well-house, he looked heated and flushed, and there were splinters of wood sticking to his clothes. Snode raised his eyebrows with a very good guess at the sort of work he had been about.

Lord Shelvin, however, did not hurry his steps. He thrust his hands into his pockets, and tried to whistle as he went along, though he glanced to right and left nervously, and started on perceiving Dowells and Snode.

"Good morning, my Lord," said Dowells, coming forward with an air a little less obsequious than usual.

"Oh, you're here, are you?" asked the viscount, in no very amiable tone.

"Yes, my Lord, we're here," said Dowells, unable to repress a glance at his partner.

"And what are you doing here?" asked the viscount sharply.

"Following the singing-woman, as you directed, my lord," said Snode.

"The singing-woman ! Miss Gold ! Ah, well, it's of no use for you to follow her any longer," said Lord Shelvin, taking out his cigar-case, and trying to look unconcerned. "The child's found."

"Oh, indeed, my Lord !" said Dowells.

And he looked at Snode.

"And may we ask who found the child, Lord Shelvin ?" asked Snode.

"That's neither here nor there. It wasn't you, at any rate," said Lord Shelvin, in whose manner there appeared a considerable amount of bravado, which, to the practised eye of the two rascals, betrayed weakness of some kind.

"So that, in fact," said Snode, in a drawling tone, after a pause, "you have no longer any need for our services, Lord Shelvin."

"That's it exactly," said the viscount, as he moved forward, attempting to pass them.

"Still, in consideration of the trouble and expense we've been put to, you will no doubt make us a handsome present ?" said Snode, in a dry tone.

"Indeed I shall not," retorted Lord Shelvin. "The principle of the undertaking was no find—no pay. There has been no find—for you. And there will be no pay—for you !"

There was another short pause, and then Snode spoke more softly, more insinuatingly than ever.

"Still, remembering the position we hold as your advisers and agents——"

"And the many little services we've rendered you before now——" put in Dowells, menacingly.

"You will no doubt," added Snode, "see your way to——"

"I shall see my way to having you ordered off the premises if you dare to talk to me of services, and position, and the rest of it," cried Lord Shelvin, who had never scrupled to insult his agents when it pleased him to do so, and who was unwise enough to give way to his feelings, on this occasion, with more energy than usual. "Why, you live by doing the dirtiest possible work in the dirtiest possible way. And as for your position, it couldn't be any lower than it is. You have no claim on me for anything in this case—none at all. There's a fiver for your expenses, however, and you may think yourselves uncommonly well paid with it!"

As he spoke he took out a pocket-book, and flung a five-pound note into the air. Dowells gave chase, like a huge and unwieldy animal in pursuit of a butterfly. But Snode remained where he was, smiling with disconcerted amiability.

"Thank you, thank you very much, Lord Shelvin," said he, with a little bow.

And the viscount had at once an inkling that he had made a mistake.

"Thank you very much, my lord," echoed Dowells, with less courtesy and more menace.

"We won't trouble you any longer, Lord Shelvin,"

went on Snode blandly, as the viscount paused in his walk, and looked disposed to treat with them.

"And we'll save you the trouble of having us ordered off the premises," said Dowells, as he gripped his partner's arm.

"*Your* premises," added Snode.

"*Lord* Shelvin," wound up Dowells.

And, Dowells chuckling, and Snode smiling more drily than ever, they raised their hats at the same moment, turned away, and started off in the opposite direction to that in which the viscount was going.

Lord Shelvin's flushed face lost its colour, and grew an ugly grey-green as he watched them walk away.

"Confound the rascals!" said he to himself, "who would have thought of their turning nasty like that. Rats leaving the sinking ship, eh! But the ship sha'n't sink, and I sha'n't go under!" And he clenched his teeth, and ground his heel into the turf. "I wish, though," he added to himself, as he turned his face again in the direction of the Hall, "I wish I hadn't been quite so frank with them! But they made me lose my temper. They're a confounded pair of rascals!" he muttered, as he walked on quickly, anxious to be safely out of the wood before Hannah and the child should come into it.

Luckily, as he thought, they had not taken the path by which Hannah would come to the old well-house.

CHAPTER XXXII

A LITTLE IMPOSTOR

WHEN Lord Shelvin had left the gamekeeper's cottage, Hannah, who stood watching him from the doorway, went back into the kitchen with a very white and anxious face.

While the viscount was talking to her, putting his arm round her in the old way, and coaxing her in his old careless manner, the charm of his presence had been enough to overcome her fears concerning the strange errand which he had assigned to her. Once left alone, however, though it never occurred to her to disobey the order given by him—she was still too much under his influence for that—she was troubled by a thousand scruples and perplexities.

Why had not the viscount insisted on carrying off the boy with him, if he was so anxious to be the first to present him to his mother? Was it not much more likely, she argued, that she was to be met by some person or persons who would take

the child away from her by force, and carry him off out of the viscount's way ?

Hannah was troubled by no scruples as to the fate of the poor child who had "come between" the property and the present holder of it. He might be the real heir, indeed she could not but think he must be, since Lord Shelvin admitted as much. But it seemed to her much harder on the viscount to turn out, than for the real viscount to be kept out of what was really his ; and she would have been glad to do anything in her power to further the cause which accorded best with her views of her own interests.

But she objected strongly to being "mixed up" in a business which was certain to get her into trouble with somebody. If the child were taken away bodily from her, she would never be forgiven by her brother Jack ; while if she disobeyed the viscount's command and stayed in the cottage with the boy, she would get herself into inconceivable disgrace with Lord Shelvin.

It was with a very ill grace, therefore, that she opened the door of the sitting-room, and told Greville to come out.

The boy obeyed, and came into the kitchen without a word.

Then Hannah was struck by the pallor of his cheeks, and asked him, not unkindly, whether he would like a bowl of bread and milk.

But Greville shook his head. He was too much disturbed to eat.

"Come, then, and warm yourself by the fire," said Hannah, with a real tone of kindness in her voice which the boy was quick to appreciate.

A slight flush came into his face, and he looked at her earnestly.

"That's like Mary's way of speaking to me," said he gently.

"Is it? Well, if Mary told you to come to the fire, you'd come, wouldn't you?"

"Oh, yes."

And as he spoke, the boy moved forward, and stood before the big open fireplace, glancing about him with great admiration. The beams which supported the roof were hung with guns and old-fashioned pistols; and a great flat glass case of hares and rabbits, pheasants and partridges, formed an imposing ornament over the high mantelshelf.

"What a nice house!" cried Greville. "I should like to live here."

Hannah, guessing what she did, could not help laughing.

"What, better than in a great big house, where you'd have lots of servants to wait on you?" asked she curiously.

"Yes, I think so," said Greville, with a sigh. "I've heard all about the big house," he went on, taking it for granted that Hannah took the point of

view of his friends, "and it must be very grand, and there must be lots of room to play horses in. But I never heard of there being any beautiful birds and rabbits in a case like that."

Hannah, much amused, burst out laughing at his ingenuousness.

"Why, that's not a grand thing!" cried she, good humouredly. "Jack did that himself, to fill up his time in the winter evenings. They wouldn't have such a thing as that up at the house, for certain."

"There will be, if I live there," replied Greville gravely. "I shall ask Jack to make me one like it, and I shall put it in the best place, where I can look at it every day."

Hannah laughed, with a little note of tenderness in her voice. She was a silly, vain creature, selfish, and not very good-tempered. But she was not heartless, and the child's innocent words touched her.

"And would you really like," she said, after a pause, lowering her voice instinctively, as if afraid that some one should hear her make the disloyal suggestion; "would you like to have the big house for yourself if you knew your having it meant ruin to the man—your own cousin, too—who'd thought it was his all the time, and who had got used to having it, eh?"

Greville did not at once understand that question. She had to put it in simpler words for him.

"Your cousin thinks it's his now, doesn't he?"

asked she. "And if it's yours, he'll have to give it up, and won't have any money to live on. Do you see that?"

"Oh, but he would have money," interrupted Greville. "I'd give him some of mine, plenty of mine. I don't know how much," he went on, thoughtfully, "because I've never had more than thirty-seven shillings in my money-box; and Mary says it's a thing I shall have to learn about. But I'd give him as much as he wanted; I know that."

"You think that now," said Hannah, shaking her head. "But if once you were Lord Shelvin, you'd have lots of people round you who would tell you all sorts of unkind tales about him, and make you change your mind."

"Well, they do say now that he isn't a kind man," said Greville rather timidly. There was a pause, and the woman and the boy looked at each other rather shyly. "That was he who came in just now, wasn't it?" he asked at last.

Hannah hesitated.

"What makes you think it was?" she asked at last, shortly.

"Well, I guessed," said Greville.

There was a much longer pause this time.

"Well, wasn't he kind to you?" asked Hannah at last, snappishly. "And weren't you very rude to him, refusing to go up to the house with him,

even when he told you he'd take you to see your own mother?"

Greville did not answer for a long time. He had taken the chair Hannah had placed for him in front of the fire, and he stared at the logs thoughtfully before committing himself to a reply. At last he said—

"I should have gone with him—the day before yesterday. I didn't think, before yesterday, there was anybody in the world who would try to do me any harm! But"—and the boy grew a little paler, and shuddered—"I had such a dreadful time last night—when I was shut up by a cruel old woman in a dark cellar, and tied up so that my wrists were cut. Look!" And he pushed up the sleeve of his little coat and showed the red marks on his arm, with the blood clotted under the skin. "And I can't help feeling different now, and seeing that people are not all like Mary and Jack!"

Hannah was looking at the boy's injured wrists with tears in her eyes.

"Why, who was it did that?" cried she indignantly.

"An old woman," said Greville. "I didn't hear her say her name, but Jack said it was Mrs. Sweech and he says she's a friend of my cousin's."

Hannah uttered a cry, half incredulous, half indignant.

"And if that was my cousin who came in here just

now, he wasn't so very kind either to you or to me, was he?" pursued Greville gravely. "And he didn't seem really glad to see me, did he?"

"Well, he was quite as glad as was to be expected," observed Hannah, who was looking troubled and undecided. "And it was rather dreadful for him to have you refuse to go with him."

"I'm very sorry if I was rude," said Greville. "But I don't think he really wanted to have me much. And I'm ready to go with you, you know."

Hannah started.

"Why are you so ready to go with me, then, if you won't go with him? We're to meet him—up at the well-house?"

"Ah, well, you're Jack's sister," cried Greville affectionately. "And it was Jack who saved me from the horrible old woman—Jack, and Tippetts, and Poppy. And it was Jack who bought me this coat and waistcoat," and he pointed in pride to his new garments. "Of course," he went on, apologetically, "I can't like them quite so well as my old ones that the woman stole, because Mary made those. But they're much smarter, and Jack says I look a man in them."

Hannah was standing in the middle of the floor, shaking like a leaf. Greville, touched and surprised, jumped down from his chair, and ran up to her.

"What's the matter?" said he, quickly. "Are

you frightened about me? Are you afraid of the old woman coming again?"

Hannah looked down into his bright, earnest little face, and the tears came into her own eyes.

"No!" cried she at last, in a dogged, determined tone which he did not understand, "I'm not afraid. Nobody shall do any harm to you as long as I'm with you. And what's more," added she, clenching her teeth, "nobody shall take you away out of my charge till I see you given up to them that'll take good care of you! There!"

And, as she spoke, Hannah snatched a hat and cloak out of a box-seat under the big window, and dressed for the walk in a defiant manner which was very puzzling to the boy.

They went out through the garden-gate together, hand-in-hand. Little Greville, who was young enough to get over impressions easily, was enchanted with the woodland walk. If Hannah had permitted it, he would have run on in front of her, enjoying to the full the delights of a spring day in the beautiful country, with the moss and the primroses under foot, and the pretty downy yellow catkins, on the long wands of the osiers, peeping out among the still bare bushes on each side.

But Hannah held his hand tightly all the way, glancing fearfully through the trees and shrubs with their pale, feathery coating of early green, and peering anxiously down each alley and each of the many

narrow side-paths which intersected the wood in all directions.

She did not know exactly what it was she feared ; but yet she thought it well to be prepared for a surprise, and she was resolved not to let the child be taken away from her, without such a fight as lungs and fingernails can make.

Suddenly, however, she stopped and turned very pale. Greville, who had been reaching up to gather some treasure of the woods as they passed, looked up at her in inquiry.

"What is it ?" asked he.

"It's—oh, it's nothing," answered Hannah hastily, "only an old lady in a donkey-chair."

For at that moment Lady Shelvin, with her maid at her side, appeared in sight, only a few paces away, driving gently up one of the wide, grass-grown paths, of which there were several cut through the wood in different directions.

Hannah wanted to hurry the boy forward, being very anxious to avoid a meeting with the old lady, for two reasons. The one was that she herself was by no means a favourite with the old dowager viscountess, who was shrewd enough to have come to some wise conclusions as to Hannah's character : the other was a fear lest the old lady should ask awkward questions about the boy who was with her.

Hannah knew, from the talk up at the great house,

that the old lady was being kept in ignorance of the appearance of a claimant to the title. Lady Shelvin was now very old; and there was a strong disinclination on the part of everybody to worry her with the details of the affair until it was absolutely necessary to do so.

Even Lady Liliass, who had come down to Drake's Hall on the previous evening with the intention of consulting her mother-in-law on the matter, had been dissuaded by General Burwood from doing so.

His advice was that the lawyers should be consulted first; and that old Lady Shelvin should be kept in ignorance of all negotiations until they were completed, and the matter was settled in one way or another.

Hannah, therefore, tried to pull the boy into the shelter of the trees when the donkey-carriage came in sight. But Greville, attracted perhaps more by the donkey than the lady, hung back, and kept his little face thus in full view both of Lady Shelvin and of the maid, who was no other than the former under-nurse, Emily.

"Emily, who—who is that boy?" cried the old lady, sharply, to the girl's exceeding consternation.

The story of the child found on the racecourse and of the commotion it had caused had of course come to her ears; but she had been warned, together with the rest of the household, not to let a whisper of it reach her aged mistress. She, however, guessed

in a moment who the child was; and, as she was not on good terms with Hannah, she tried to turn the subject by casting an aspersion upon that young woman.

"Oh, my lady," said she, in a whisper, which, however, Hannah heard, "you'd better not ask. Don't you see he's with the head-keeper's wife?"

Lady Shelvin frowned. She had been curious enough to whip up her pony, and was now within a few feet of the woman and the boy, who had their backs turned to her, and were making their way towards the well-house. But the old lady's curiosity got the better of her discretion, and she called to Hannah, who would have taken no notice. The boy, however, turned at once; and as he did so, the white lock of hair caught her eye.

"Hannah!" cried she again, "Hannah Mallory!"

Hannah turned, and came slowly a few steps back, keeping tight hold of Greville's hand, and not raising her eyes from the ground. She was desperately frightened. She dared not confess who the child claimed to be; nothing, indeed, but dread of the aged lady, who was energetic still upon occasion, would have induced her to return at all.

"Who is that boy?" asked the lady sharply.
"What is his name?"

"His name is Tom, my lady," replied she hastily.
"Make a bow, Tom," she added, to the boy.

But Greville did not move. He remained standing

within a few feet of the wheel-chair, looking at the old lady with a strange intentness.

Lady Shelvin, on her side, was also much moved. Staring at the boy's open, handsome face through her gold-rimmed square double-eyeglass, she murmured to herself, with trembling lips—

"How like! How strangely like!" Then she put out her hand kindly, and said, in a voice which was not so strong as at first, "And so your name is Tom! And what—and what—else?"

In spite of the warning pressure of Hannah's hand, the boy looked up steadily and answered—

"My name is not Tom. It's Greville—Greville Garrington!"

Hannah gave him an impatient shake, and dropped his hand indignantly. Emily uttered a little scream. Only the old lady remained perfectly still, perfectly silent.

"Won't you—won't you drive on, my lady?" asked Emily, in a frightened voice.

But the old lady made a gesture to silence her.

"Greville Garrington!" she repeated slowly, still gazing intently at the boy's face. "Nonsense, boy! There is no one living with the right to bear that name." Turning sharply to Hannah, she said haughtily, "You are a bold woman, I know. But even you might have shrunk from the liberty of letting the child assume our name."

"The boy is not mine, my lady!" cried Hannah

indignantly. "I don't know anything about him. It's somebody else has taught him these tales."

"Not yours?" said the old lady, faintly. And then there was a pause. Hannah did not dare to drag the boy away, but stood, trembling yet indignant, a few feet away. While Greville, strangely excited by this meeting, the meaning of which he dimly understood, looked up into the agitated face of the aged lady, with a child's eager, inquiring eyes. "I'll ask the boy myself!" said Lady Shelvin, rejecting Emily's proffered smelling-salts. "Little boy, come here!"

Greville came. But even as the old lady stretched out her hand to raise his cap, and to get a better look at his head and face, Emily whispered on the other side—

"Don't, my lady, don't! You'd better not ask him any questions. It'll only upset you. There's been a woman prowling about the house all the morning, trying to get a word with Lady Lilius, I think. The boy belongs to her, I expect."

While she spoke her mistress had sat back a few moments with her eyes closed, as if recovering from a shock, or collecting her thoughts. When the girl had finished speaking the lady made a gesture for her to retire, and opening her eyes, bent forward towards the boy.

"Don't you know," she asked sternly, "that it's wicked to tell lies?"

"Yes; that's why I wouldn't say my name was Tom when she wanted me to," explained Greville simply, with an apologetic glance at Hannah.

"But you should obey your mother," said Lady Shelvin, more sharply still.

"Oh, yes, I will obey my mother," said Greville.

"And—who—who is your mother, then?" asked the lady, with an effort.

"Lady Liliashelvin," replied Greville promptly.

Lady Shelvin stood the shock well. While the two other women made grimaces at Greville, significant of their disgust with him, the aged lady drew a long breath, but only paused a moment before turning to Emily.

"The child has been coached up by some designing persons," said she, "who have taken advantage of his intelligence and of his chance resemblance to the portraits of my son, Lord Shelvin, when a child."

"Ye—es, my lady," said Emily, trembling.

"We must have this cleared up, and the people punished," said Lady Shelvin, in a high key.

"Ye—es, my lady."

"You must come up to the house with me," she went on sternly to Greville.

"Oh, will you take me to my mother?" interrupted the boy eagerly.

"You will certainly be given into the care of your mother, when we find her!" retorted she.

"Lady Liliass?" said Greville.

"Certainly not. I cannot have Lady Liliass disturbed by such an absurd story."

"Then I won't go with you," said Greville, withdrawing promptly from the side of the chair. "I won't go anywhere with anybody else till I find Mary!"

"Mary!" echoed Lady Shelvin, with a glance at Emily. "That will be his mother, of course. And where is she?" she asked tartly of the child.

"I don't know!" said Greville, his little face puckering rather piteously. "Jack said he'd bring her, but—then I had to come away!"

"And it was this Mary," interrupted Lady Shelvin, "who taught you to call yourself Greville Garrington?"

"Yes."

"Well, you are only a little boy, and the blame of this wicked attempt at personation belongs to others rather than you," said she very sternly. "But you are old enough to understand this. If you persist in calling yourself by a name which is not your own, you will not only get severely punished yourself, but you will get this Mary and your other friends put into prison. You understand?"

"Yes, I understand."

"And you will give up using this name, and go back to your own?" pursued Lady Shelvin, with strange, almost tremulous earnestness.

"No," cried Greville with fire. "I can't go back to any other name, because I haven't got any other. Greville Garrington is my name, and I'm proud of it, and I sha'n't give it up! You can take away my coat, as the woman did in the cellar; but you can't take away my name, if you try as long as you live."

Lady Shelvin looked at him earnestly for a few seconds, and then she burst into tears. The next moment, however, she recovered herself, and said, with more severity than before—

"You defy me, you, a child?"

"Yes," cried Greville, now as much excited as she, "I do defy you to take away the only thing I've got left, now I've lost M—M—Mary!"

And breaking down in his turn, he sobbed.

There was a pause, and then the old lady said, harshly—

"You're a very impudent, forward child! And—and——." Quite suddenly her voice broke, and her whole face softened with some strong emotion. "And—I wish your story were true!" she cried impulsively, as she drew the boy close to her and printed a hasty, but passionate kiss on his fair forehead. The next moment, recovering her dignity and her severity, she pushed him from her, and said sternly, "Go away, go away! You have some spirit, child! But you are in bad hands, in bad hands! Be warned, and learn to speak the truth."

Then before the astonished child could utter a word of protest, she had given the reign a jerk, the donkey had set off, and she was disappearing fast along the green lane, followed, at a great rate, by the maid.

"Who's that?" asked Greville, in a whisper.

"That's Lady Shelvin, of course," replied Hannah tartly.

"Then she's my grandmama!" cried Greville.

"You'd better run after her and tell her so," jeered Hannah.

But Greville's attention had been attracted by something sweeter than old Lady Shelvin's reproaches.

"Listen," cried he. "I do believe I hear Mary's voice."

Hannah listened, but what she heard was the voice of her brother, and she was instantly filled with great alarm.

"Look here," cried she in desperate earnest, as she still dragged the boy towards the old well-house, which was now in sight, "you don't want to get me into any more trouble than you have done, eh?"

"No; oh, no," cried Greville.

"Well, then, for mercy's sake run into the well-house with me till they've passed. Then you can run out after them, and I can get home. If Jack knew I'd brought you out he'd—he'd beat me!" cried she, with the tears in her eyes.

Her agitation, exaggerated as it was, affected the boy, and he consented.

So they ran on together towards the fatal spot, away from the loving friends who were in search of Greville, away from the loving arms which were aching to embrace and shield him.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE OLD WELL

JACK MALLORY had had little trouble in finding Mary. He had taken a short cut and had come upon her, after some little search, on the outskirts of the wood looking down upon the house.

Although she was pale with her night's watching, she looked, in his eyes, sweeter of face than ever.

"Mary," said he softly, as he came up.

And when she turned, with a start, the sight of the smile on his face was enough for her. The change from anxiety to joy was too great: she uttered a low cry and staggered. Jack caught her, and imprinted on her lips a long kiss.

"Come," whispered he, "I've found him, I've brought him back to you."

But he would not answer any of her questions, knowing well that after the suspense she had been suffering, the recital of the boy's adventures would be too much for her. So he chatted about the child's appearance, about his interest in the journey,

until they came to the cottage, where he dashed into the sitting-room with an eager cry on his lips.

The next moment, however, he came out, white and in desperate alarm.

"The boy's gone !" cried he hoarsely. "And Hannah, my sister—she's gone too !"

For a moment they stood looking into each other's eyes, dumb with horror. Then Jack seized Mary's arm and dragged her across the lane towards the wood.

"There's only one place," cried he, in a shaking voice, "they can have gone to—the Hall !"

They traversed the wood almost in silence. Mary's fears bordered on despair. As for Jack, though he tried to encourage her by mute pressures of the hand, he was nearly as much alarmed as she. He knew well what sort of enemies these were who menaced the child ; and that Mrs. Sweech was not the most brutal, the most callous among them. Jack had not been near the Hall yet, so that he did not know of the presence there of the viscount himself. But Mary had already told him that Dowells and Snode were about ; and these two worthies Jack knew to be capable of any villainy.

It was, therefore, with the most agonised feelings that these two unhappy beings, on their way through the wood for the second time, heard a series of piercing shrieks, which echoed through the morning stillness.

"It's Greville ! It's my boy !" shrieked Mary, clasping her hands in piteous horror.

"And my sister !" cried Jack, scarcely less terror-struck than she. "Come, quick, this way ! My God !" cried he, as, a few seconds later, they came out into the open space in the heart of the wood. "It's the old well ! What—what has happened ?"

But before he had finished uttering the words the cries and shrieks had died away into faint gurglings, and then into silence.

Jack tore across the open space, forced in the door, and pulled himself up just in time.

At his feet was the old well, no longer covered. And on the rough, splintered edge of one of the displaced boards that lay close to the mouth was a jagged, torn portion of the little coat he had bought for Greville the evening before.

He uttered a loud cry of horror as he looked in vain for some means of descending into the well below him.

CHAPTER XXXIV

A COUNCIL

IT was in vain that Emily tried to keep pace with the donkey-chair on the return home. Old Lady Shelvin whipped up the animal, and got down the lane through the wood, and out into the main drive through the grounds, at such a pace that it was impossible for the maid to keep up with her.

The dowager viscountess was pursued by an idea, a haunting fancy that made her restless and uneasy. She had reached the open part of the park, and was in sight of the front entrance of the Hall, when there reached her ears a cry, which, faint as the distance made it, caused her to start and to look round.

There was nothing to be seen. Indeed the cry, which was succeeded by another and another, seemed to come from the very heart of the wood.

She could do nothing by turning back. She therefore drove on faster than ever to the house, and told the servant who came down to help her out of her chair, that some of the gardeners and grooms

were to go at once to the wood, as she had heard cries of distress as she came along.

Then she went indoors and made her way at once into the West Wing where her daughter-in-law lived. The old lady had not heard of the arrival of the visitors, and she stopped short in astonishment on finding General Burwood, whom she knew, and Geoffrey Wilmer, whom she did not know, in earnest conversation with Lady Liliass.

The council between these three had lasted for two hours since they were interrupted by the entrance of the viscount, whose arrival had, for the time, driven Lady Liliass away. But on his withdrawal, she had returned to resume her consultation with these two practical friends, who did their best to persuade her to acknowledge her boy.

But she was obstinate with the almost mute obstinacy of the gentle and the weak, shaking her head, and keeping her lips tightly closed, with that look of dumb but indomitable resistance which men dread in a woman.

She had given her reasons, therefore what could she do more, but dumbly, firmly resist? She had told them how strong her fear of Lord Shelvin was, how strong her belief that he would never suffer his cousin to oust him from the property and the title he had now so long enjoyed; and she declared that, rather than allow the boy to come within the range of his influence, she would deny all her previous

declarations, and confess that she did throw her own child into the river at Bristol, as she was alleged to have done.

She was still sitting with her hands clasped tightly together, and with the pathetic look of stolid yet miserable determination on her pale, set face, when old Lady Shelvin entered.

A strange, weird figure she looked, the withered, bent relic of a former age, as she leaned on her ebony-handled stick, in her long, black, sable-lined cloak, and close-fitting black satin bonnet, shaped like the old-fashioned head-covering of the Quaker ladies.

Lady Lilius rose on the entrance of her mother-in-law, and the old lady looked at her with scrutinising eyes.

"Visitors, and so early," cried she, as she held out one little withered, wax-like hand to the General, with a grave, faint smile ; and then she turned, without giving time for an answer, to the younger man. "And who is this, Lilius ?"

But perhaps her shrewd eyes, dim as they were getting, saw enough to make her guess in what relation this visitor stood to her daughter-in-law ; for she looked from the one to the other, and back again, two or three times, before she got any reply.

"This is Mr. Wilmer, from Gillingham, mama," said Lady Lilius.

And a flash of understanding illumined the old lady's lined, yellow face, as she walked forward and took the chair the General brought for her.

"I have something important to say to you, Liliās," said she, in a slightly husky voice. Then immediately, as both gentlemen prepared to withdraw, she stopped them by a regal gesture. "No, no. If I am not mistaken, you are here on important business too. It may be the same as mine ; for I fancy," and she looked rather sharply at her daughter-in-law, "that something has been kept from me lately. There have been signs, visible to my eyes, old as they are, that there has been some sort of agitation in the household during the past two days. Is it not so ?" she asked, with a sudden accession of sharpness.

Lady Liliās hesitated to answer, so the old lady shrugged her shoulders, and went on : "Well, here is my business. I have seen, out in the wood on the hill, a child——" There was no further pretence of hesitation or indifference on the part of Lady Liliās. She sprang erect, and stood clutching the back of her chair, a strange and striking picture in her long, trailing gown of violet velvet, against which her golden knot of hair shone out brilliantly in the sunshine. "A child," went on Lady Shelvin, "who claims to be your son, who calls himself, or who has been taught to call himself—Greville Garrington——"

She paused, and Lady Liliās murmured faintly—

"He is here, then! Already? Oh, mercy, mercy!"

On the last words, which were an almost broken-hearted prayer, she broke down utterly, and sinking back in her chair, all her cold dignity and stubborn resistance gone, burst into a piteous passion of weeping.

"Ah!" broke from Lady Shelvin's lips.

Then she looked from one to the other of the two gentlemen, and in their faces she read the truth, which she had already guessed. The next moment she also broke down. The remembrance of the cries she had heard came back to her with a fresh vividness, born of suspicion. If General Burwood had not hastened to her side, the old lady, who had risen in her turn, would have fallen to the floor.

Before she could give voice to the terrible fears which now possessed her, however, Lady Lilius recovered enough self-control to look up and say—

"Mama, the child you saw was my child. I have known for years that he was alive. I saw him at Epsom yesterday."

Astonishment gave back to Lady Shelvin her power of speech.

"You knew he was alive! Yet you took no steps to bring him back! You saw him yesterday, yet you said nothing to me! Why, how was this?"

"Because, mama, to bring him here would have been to bring him to danger—to death," replied Lady Liliás, with spirit. "Because you never listened to me, to my fears, my suspicions, in the old time ; and you would not have listened to them now. Because you have kept your ears closed except to one voice, and that voice that of the enemy of my son."

In the dead silence of the rest of the occupants of the room, her carefully chosen, deliberate words rang out with all the impressiveness of sincere conviction.

Every one, and not the least Lady Liliás herself, expected that this challenge would be taken up with fire by the old lady, whose spirit had suffered little quenching by the chills of age.

But to their surprise she was silent. Sitting back in the chair in which they had gently placed her, she closed her eyes and listened with bent head, and an air of something like remorse, to her daughter-in-law's bitter words.

After a short, but terrible pause, she rose feebly, and only saying, in a low voice, "I—I will see you again presently, General," she walked slowly and with difficulty, refusing all aid, towards the door.

When Geoffrey Wilmer opened it for her, the sound of a babel of voices, agitated, excited, came to their ears from the great hall at the end of the corridor below.

"What's that? Who's that?" asked Lady Shelvin.

But before she could be answered, before she could advance another step, Lady Liliás, her long violet gown trailing behind her, had flown out of the West Saloon, and passing them all, had run like a hare to the staircase.

"What is it? What has happened?" she cried to the group she perceived surrounding Lord Shelvin in the hall below. Then, recognising Jack, she called to him, "Mallory, tell me! Where is——"

Her voice died away, for at that moment, even before she had seen the look of anguish on Jack's honest face as she put this question to him, the viscount ran up the stairs to her, and, putting his hand on her shrinking arm, said, in a voice which, to her ears, seemed to ring with hypocrisy—

"Calm yourself, my dear Lady Liliás. It may not be true. I am too distressed for words. But a child——a little boy, has fallen down the old well in the wood, and it is feared that——"

Lady Liliás interrupted him with a shriek of wild laughter.

Springing back on the stairs, she pointed at him with a steady finger—

"If my son is dead, Lord Shelvin, you have murdered him!"

CHAPTER XXXV

THE REVENGE OF DOWELLS AND SNODE

THERE was a murmur in the crowd below. Every one had heard her wild words ; and to the horror-struck murmur there succeeded a hush. Some of the members of the household tried to steal out of sight ; while one figure, standing out among the rest, in stained and dirty clothes, came forward boldly to the foot of the stairs. It was Jack Mallory, the gamekeeper.

“My lady,” cried he, in a strong, clear voice, “my lady, your child——”

At these words the viscount turned angrily where he stood on the stairs. But Jack went on—

“Your boy has not fallen down the well. I went down myself to see.”

“I’m afraid you made a mistake,” said Lord Shelvin sharply. “The child has disappeared. Every one seems to have heard cries coming from the well-house, and on arriving there with Miss Gold, you say you found the boards above the mouth of the well broken and rotted away——”

"Not rotted away ; they had been cut through, my lord," said Jack, firmly.

"Well, anyhow this unlucky child is not to be found. But take courage, Lady Liliass ; I pay no attention to your wild words, and I sympathise and feel for you with all my heart. We will leave no stone unturned ; we will hunt every corner of the country ; if the boy is alive, he shall be in your arms within forty-eight hours."

The tone of deep sincerity and compassion which he was clever enough to assume, his magnanimous gentleness towards the distracted lady, told in his favour with the group below.

But Lady Liliass did not turn her head towards him. She was still looking at Jack Mallory, who was standing, with Mary Gold by his side, in the full light thrown by the great staircase stained window. When the viscount had finished speaking, she went straight down the stairs, and touched Mary on the shoulder. Her eyes were dry and burning ; her voice sounded harsh, and unlike her own.

• And you," said she, "what do *you* think ? You, who love my boy as I do ?"

"There has been foul play !" cried Mary, who would have passed for a woman of fifty, so lined, so worn, so drawn and pinched with terrible emotion • did her poor face look. "The boards had been cut through, torn up. But—the child is not there.

He has been stolen, stolen again. I don't know where he is. I don't know who has got him. But he will be in some vile hands, some hands that have been paid for this."

She spoke in a hollow voice, and seemed not to be conscious that a crowd was listening to her. A thrill of horror went round the household, the members of which had now slunk back into nooks and corners, frightened by what they saw and heard.

Lord Shelvin, who had maintained such a discreet and quiet demeanour when Lady Lilius accused him, seemed unable to bear this further indictment, vague as it was. At any rate, he drew back into the shadow of the corridor upstairs, where the light from the great window could not fall on him.

And in the midst of the silence which fell after Mary's speech, there was a loud clang of the bell at the front entrance, and a noise of stifled laughter and shuffling feet.

This sound, at such a time, when nerves were at their highest tension, and the women, from the highest to the lowest, were nervous and inclined to be hysterical, caused little screams to be heard on all sides. For a moment the men-servants seemed to have forgotten their duties; and there was a short pause before one of the footmen crossed the hall to open the door.

Then at once the well-known, affected tones of

Poppy Binks fell upon Mary's ears. And the next moment that young lady herself walked in, followed by Tippetts, who was as shamefaced and humble as she was assertive and self-possessed.

"This 'ere is Lady Liliashelvin's, I believe? Can I see 'er ladyship?" asked Poppy, who was pushing her way in as she spoke.

On seeing the crowd of people gathered in the hall she looked surprised, but not abashed; and at once perceiving Mary, she gave her a condescending little nod.

"Where's 'er ladyship? Lady Liliashelvin?" she asked again.

"What do you want with me?" asked the lady herself, with an intuition that this strange intrusion concerned her child. "Have you brought my boy?"

"No, but I've come about him. I may say as we've both come about 'im, my young man and me. We caught Sweech, the old woman as stole your child, my lady, and we gave her such a trouncing as you never see, and I shied buckets of water over the old lady till I couldn't do it no more. And what's more, my lady," cried she triumphantly, as she waved above her head a letter which had evidently passed through hands not over-clean, "I've got a letter away from her that I think will interest—h'm!—some of yer!"

As she held up the letter, Lord Shelvin, emerging abruptly from his retirement in the corridor above,

darted down the stairs, and would have snatched the letter from Poppy's fingers if Jack Mallory had not been too quick for him.

"Give that to me. I order you to give that letter to me," cried the viscount, suppressing his agitation as well as he could, but not hiding from Jack's sharp eyes the desperate anxiety he felt to gain possession of it.

But Jack stood firm.

"Asking your pardon, my lord," said he, gravely, "for having to disobey you. But things are too grave now for me not to hold tight to any scrap of what may be—evidence."

"You dare to be insolent to me, your master!" cried Lord Shelvin, who was livid and hoarse with rage.

As he spoke, he seized a hunting-crop from a stand in the hall, and would have slashed at the young keeper but for the unexpected interposition of General Burwood, who had been a silent spectator of the whole scene, and who had come down the stairs quietly when the dispute arose between Lord Shelvin and the gamekeeper.

"Come, Shelvin," said he in a low voice, as he seized the hunting-crop and held it fast. "The man's justified in a case as grave as this."

"Justified in defying his master!" cried Lord Shelvin, who had lost all self-control, and who was shivering like a leaf in the wind.

"My lord," said Jack, gravely, "I'd have given it you, if I hadn't seen it was in *your handwriting!*"

This admission was a rash one, perhaps, in the present state of the viscount's temper. It caused a little thrill to run through every one who heard it; and it wrung from Mary, who knew more than the rest, a low cry of horror.

"Wretch!" cried she, between her teeth.

Lord Shelvin turned towards her sharply, but he did not speak.

Then the voice of Tippetts broke in, as he pulled his forelock to the General, and addressed himself to him.

"Sir," said he, "there's some folks standing outside as will tell you whether that chap's justified or not."

All this time the footman who had opened the door to Tippetts and his sweetheart was standing there, parleying in a low voice with some one outside—some one who wanted to come in. And on hearing this rough-and-ready form of introduction by Tippetts, the would-be intruder took courage, and thrust his head in at the door, in spite of the servant's efforts to keep him out.

It was Dowells, in such a state of disorder, with so many rents in his coat and such a very battered hat and grimy face, that the scruples of the man were entirely explained.

"Yes, yes, let me in. Let us in. We've got a lot

to explain, we have !” cried the miserable agent, in a vicious tone.

On hearing the voice of this man, Lord Shelvin had started, and attempted to come forward with an air of menace. But before he could reach the door, it had been forced wide open by Dowells, who was panting and pointing down the drive at some person or persons not yet in sight.

“I’m very sorry to have to intrude in this condition, especially as there are ladies present,” said Dowells, snuffling out his words as clearly as his cold would permit, “but when justice is to be done, I’m sure you’ll agree with be, ladies and gentlemen, that all other codsiderations bust give way to that. My lord,” and he turned to Lord Shelvin, and made him a clumsy bow, “I’ve had the hodour, in conjunction with my partner, of serving you for some years now, doing your dirty work, your very dirty work, as you most truly observed to us both a short time ago. But even we have to draw the line somewhere, my lord. And when we saw you at work in the little well-house in the wood this morning——”

“What on earth do you mean ? Is the fellow drunk ?” cried Lord Shelvin, who was more like a madman than a sane person, and who had to be restrained by the General on one side and by Geoffrey Wilmer on the other, from flying at Dowells’ throat like a hound.

"I mean that by partner, Mr. Sdode, and myself, watched your proceedings in the well-house with much interest, and had the curiosity to go inside afterwards and find out what you had done there. And while we were inside, we heard some one clobbering, so we took the precaution to stand just inside the door, for fear of accidents. And we were so very fortunate as to be able to seize a lady and a little boy who came running straight in a minute later, and who would inevitably have fallen down the well—for the mouth had been left exposed, Lord Shelvin—if it had not been for our presence."

At this point he was interrupted by Lord Shelvin's falling forward in a fit. The two gentlemen who were with him took him into the dining-room and summoned assistance, and while this was going on two women, both white, trembling, but with an indescribable look of intense, vivid joy in their eyes, met and looked each into the face of the other with a sense of relief too acute for speech.

They were Lady Lilius and Mary Gold, the mother by birth and the mother by love of the missing boy.

And at that moment the door was pushed open again, and Greville himself, panting and out of breath, ran straight in and fell into Mary's arms.

"Mary! Oh, Mary!" was all the child could say as he clung to her and would not be dislodged, even to go to his own mother.

Behind him, and almost as much out of breath as he, came Snode and the unhappy Hannah, who was sobbing as if her heart would break. "Yes, yes, yes, I know what you're going to say to me," cried she, brokenly, as Jack turned towards her with a frown. "I did do wrong. I did bring the boy away from the cottage. But, Jack, I never let him go! I've been with him all the time. If he'd fallen into that well, as was meant—I'm sure of it!" and she ground her teeth angrily, "I should have gone in too! As it was, I was as near frightened out of my life as the boy was when we found ourselves seized in the well-house. I thought the child would have fainted, that I did!"

"What, what!" cried Jack. "Then it was your screaming that we heard? But how did you get away so quickly?"

"That," interrupted Snode very politely, "was my fault and my partner's. You must excuse us if we left you in some suspense. But we had our own ends to serve, I confess it, in wishing it to be supposed, at first, that the child had fallen into the trap prepared for him. We got the young lady and the child out of the well-house immediately, and we kept them out of the way of the search party, so that we might bring them up to the house ourselves, and—and—well, and give Lord Shelvin a little surprise."

There was no mistaking the venom which shone

in the eyes of both partners when they referred to their former patron and employer. Hating him like poison for his insolent behaviour to them, they had borne with his insults as long as it had paid them to do so, but were delighted to find a way of paying off their old grudge against him after his rash severance of a connection which had ceased to be profitable to either side.

They were now very anxious as to the viscount's absence, and assiduous in inquiries about him when, a few minutes later, General Burwood and Geoffrey Wilmer came out of the dining-room and asked Lady Lillas to send for a doctor.

She gave the necessary order, and looked at Geoffrey; but she could not see him, for her eyes were now full of blinding tears. She had been standing all this time with her hands on her boy; but the child had not yet relaxed his clasp of Mary's neck, but hung about her, almost insensible from joy at having recovered the protectress whom he had thought never to see again.

"What is the matter?" stammered Lady Lillas at last.

"Apoplexy," said Geoffrey.

She shivered.

"What will Lady Shelvin say?"

All this time they had forgotten the aged lady in the excitement of the rapid succession of events in the hall. Now they went in search of her, and

found her crouching in a heap at the end of the corridor at the top of the stairs. She had seen everything, heard everything, but she made no comment, no sign. She did not mention her nephew, and it was not until they had led her gently back to her own room that she said, in a very weak but gentle voice—

“Let the woman—and the child—my grandson—be brought to me.”

When he came he was led by two loving women, his mother on one side and Mary on the other.

Old Lady Shelvin, in her white woollen dressing-gown, sat up in her deep armchair and held out her hand—

“So you are really Greville Garrington?” she said, in a very tender voice.

“Yes.”

“And you have come to live here with us?”

“Yes, if you please.”

“And you think you will be able to get on with us, without your kind friend?”

And she held out a gracious hand to Mary.

“I wouldn’t come unless she told me to,” said Greville, “but she will be near, and I can see her when I like. Jack says so!”

“But you’ll love your mother a little, won’t you, Greville?” asked Lady Lilius in a broken voice.

“Oh, yes, I will; and I’ll help the gentleman downstairs to take care of you!”

The child's sharp eyes had detected already the solicitude of Geoffrey Wilmer, and this speech sent a laugh round the circle.

After a few minutes Greville said rather abruptly—

“May I go downstairs and speak to Jack, before he goes away? He said he'd have to go away!”

Permission having been at once given, Greville, watched anxiously and curiously from the top of the stairs by his two mothers, went down and asked for Jack, who came to him looking very stern.

“Jack,” said the boy, inserting his small hand in the gamekeeper's broad palm, “I want you to do something for me.”

“Anything, anything, Master Greville—I mean my lord.”

Greville looked at him open-mouthed, and smiled a little. It had not occurred to him yet that he was such a great person.

“I want you,” said he coaxingly, in a whisper, “to forgive Hannah. She's dreadfully afraid of what you'll say to her, I know.”

Jack frowned again. The child could not know what doubts, what fears this act of disobedience on the part of Hannah had roused in her brother's mind. But he looked down at the child and felt that he could not retract his promise, could not refuse this first request of his young master.

“Very well, my lord, I'll—I'll forgive her—as you wish.”

And he kept his word. When Hannah, who was waiting for him in the housekeeper's room, and who was in a state of violent agitation at the thought of being left alone with her brother, met him a few minutes later, his face, though still stern, was not unkind.

"Hannah," said he as they went out and across the park together in the soft light of a slightly cloudy April afternoon, "the young master says I'm to forgive you, and I've promised. But, my girl, it's hard to guess at what has come into my mind to-day. No, don't cry, my girl. We'll let bygones be bygones, in honour of the young master's return, and of God's goodness to us all."

And he raised his hat as he spoke, with a thanksgiving in his honest heart for the joys which the day had brought.

When the doctor who had been sent for to attend Lord Shelvin arrived at Drake's Hall, he found that he had no patient. The dispossessed viscount, profiting by the very first occasion of being left alone with a servant whom he could trust, had left Drake's Hall, and insisted on being carried, ill as he was, to London.

And this flight, so sudden, so unexpected, reassured the trembling heart of Lady Liliass. Her son, her own long-lost son, was left in sole possession.

CHAPTER XXXVI

PEACE

WITH a sudden flash of her old indomitable energy, the Dowager Viscountess Shelvin placed herself once more at the head of the affairs of the household on hearing of her nephew's abrupt departure from the Hall.

She saw that this disappearance could only be described as a flight, and that it gave the strongest possible proof, if proof was needed, of the strength of little Greville's claim to the title and the property.

She therefore insisted that all the persons who had come down to Drake's Hall about this business of the child should remain on the premises until Mr. Ropley could arrive from London to interrogate them all formally. Mary Gold, Hannah Mallory, General Burwood, Geoffrey Wilmer, with Tippetts, the dashing "Poppy," and the undesirable Dowells and Snode, all were detained at Drake's Hall until the lawyer could take the matter in hand.

Only the last two found this stay disagreeable.

Dowells and Snode, useful as they had been, felt that they occupied no very high place in the esteem of the rest of the party; and although Dowells looked better when his clothes had been brushed, he and his partner seemed rather a forlorn pair as they sauntered about the grounds together, and found it hard to fill up the time till they should be able to return to London and their own peculiar business.

Geoffrey Wilmer, on the other hand, found the stay under the same roof with his early love very agreeable indeed. Lady Shelvin had condescended, after the first shock of his coming, to look kindly upon the handsome, gentle-mannered Geoffrey, and even to contemplate, without anger, the possibility of the remarriage of her daughter-in-law.

As for Lady Liliass, she had become a different woman. The pall of heavy reserve and depression, which had hung over her life for the past seven years, had been dragged away; and the sunny, sweet nature of the timid, gentle woman shone out again, now that she was surrounded by the joys of maternal love on the one hand, and of old and tried devotion on the other.

The lover of her girlish days had never forgotten her, never suffered the image of another woman to eclipse hers in his heart. His was a nature almost as gentle, though not as weak, as her own; and the prospect of winning his old love at last filled him

with a happiness which the woman herself felt that she was unworthy of inspiring.

General Burwood occupied himself in examining and cross-examining the rest of the party, until he knew all that they had to tell of Greville's strange story. And at each question he grew more convinced that there would be little difficulty in establishing his identity in the fullest manner.

The letter which Poppy Binks had taken from Mrs. Sweech, which proved to be the very one so rashly despatched by the viscount from the race-course at Epsom, afforded the strongest proof that Greville's cousin had been equally satisfied as to the validity of the boy's claims.

Poppy was proud beyond measure of her share in the affair, and discreetly dropped all reference to the previous error of judgment by which she had allowed Mrs. Sweech to get rid of her and to carry off the boy. She was convinced that every word and action of hers impressed those around her with the belief that she had been used to houses of the class to which Drake's Hall belonged. And the fact that she was entertained in the servants' hall and not in the reception rooms of the family she ascribed to the presence of Tippetts, who, of course, poor fellow, would have been as much out of place with the family as she herself was with the servants. Poppy took her revenge by patronising the entire household, from the dignified housekeeper down-

wards. But this patronage led to no evil results, as her airs amused everybody else as much as they satisfied herself.

As for Tippetts, he was so proud of having had a hand in the restoration of Greville to his family, and in the punishment of Mrs. Sweech, that he spent his time in smiling with such goodwill that there seemed a danger of this expression of face becoming permanent and embarrassing. He was delighted with the stables ; but the very first sight he had of them made him modestly give up his cherished design of undertaking the charge of them. He began to solace himself with the ambition of driving the young master about London, when he should have saved enough money to buy a hansom of his own.

Poor Hannah, contrite and remorseful, stayed on at her brother's cottage only until she should have given such information as she possessed in the case to Mr. Ropley. She had made up her mind to go away to live with her other brother, who kept a large dairy-farm some forty miles away, to be away from the place where she had suffered so bitterly. She had cared for the viscount infinitely more than he had ever cared for her ; and the shock of finding that he had prepared a trap for her death as well as that of the child, had almost broken her heart. She was a sobered, a changed woman, with all the frivolity of her nature gone, but also all the youthful brightness.

"I shall end my days as a mere drudge now," said she to Jack, gloomily, as they sat by the big fire in his cottage on the evening after the great events, "and I won't be a drag upon you. You will have some one to look after you, before the summer leaves are on the trees."

Jack would willingly have kept her with him; but he saw that she was right to go, that she would be happier away from the associations which the sight of every tree and every flower must call up. And it was quite true, as she said, that he would not long be left alone.

For Mary Gold had now no excuse to offer when Jack Mallory asked her, as he made a point of doing whenever he met her—and this was many times through the day—when she intended to take him for a husband. And indeed there was a half-heartedness about her manner of putting him off which assured her lover that he would not be kept much longer in suspense when once the business with the lawyers was over. Her boy had found his own mother now; and poor Mary, not without a pang, felt that her place must henceforth be a secondary one with her darling, even in spite of his own wishes.

Poor little Greville could not, of course, quite understand this difference yet. He was running after Mary, he had her name upon his lips, every hour in the day. Mary must come and see the

ducks in the pond at the bottom of the field at the home farm. Mary must help him to make a big bunch of violets for grandmama. Mary must come and play at hide-and-seek along the corridors, and up and down that splendid wide staircase which the boy already loved.

It was hard for her to have to tell him that he must get used to doing without her ; it was harder still to bear his sobs, as he threw his arms round her neck and told her he couldn't, no, he wouldn't live without her, and that if she must go away, he would go to.

Mary tried hard to be severe as she answered that there were duties to think of in the world, as well as pleasures ; and that his were very different now from what they had been in the old days when he used to learn his lessons on the kitchen roof, outside the garret window, in their little London home, among the nasturtiums.

" You've got to learn a thousand things that your poor Mary did not know how to teach you, my boy," she whispered tenderly into his ears. " And you've got to grow up to take your place as a great gentleman, and to do your best for the numbers and numbers of people whose happiness will be greatly dependent upon you. I've tried to teach you that you must always be ready to do your duty ; and if you want to be a credit to your poor old Mary, you must set to work with a good heart to learn it now."

"But you won't be very far away from me, will you, Mary?" asked the boy, plaintively, looking lovingly into her eyes.

"Why no?" replied Mary, with a little flush rising in her cheeks, "I don't suppose I shall be so very far off."

So Greville patted her cheek, and nodded gravely, and had to be satisfied.

The little fellow did not quite understand, as yet, that there were charms about the possession of Drake's Hall, with its gardens and its woods and lanes, even superior to those of the canariensis and the nasturtiums!

On the other hand, he was free from the misgivings and doubts which still haunted the minds of his elders, concerning the dispossessed Lord Shelvin and his doings. Lady Lilius, in particular, had a heavy weight at her heart in her moments of solitude, so great was her fear of Captain Garrington and his villainies.

It was, therefore, with unfeigned relief that she heard from Mr. Ropley, when he arrived two days after the departure of the viscount, that all danger from that direction was at an end.

Captain Garrington, as Mr. Ropley took care now to style him, had died at the hotel in London to which he had been taken, on the morning after his arrival there, of a second seizure similar to that which had attacked him previous to his departure from Drake's Hall.

It was useless to make parade of great grief at the death of a man who had been as careless as a landlord as he had been profligate and heartless as a man. And there was no denying that his death had taken all the family out of a very serious difficulty ; for it would have been difficult to avoid a prosecution after the facts which had come to light, and the newspapers would have been full of a most startling and disagreeable scandal.

As it was, there leaked out some things which the family would fain have kept to themselves. Such a strange story as that of the disappearance of the boy and his recovery, was too sensational not to get into the papers. But the evidence in support of the boy's identity was so overwhelming, that there was little difficulty in establishing his claim.

Unluckily, it appeared that Captain Garrington had held the property long enough to plunge it into difficulties and to burden it so heavily that it would require the peace of Greville's long minority to put matters right again. This, however, was a small evil compared to the great good the estate experienced in getting rid of its late spendthrift and profligate holder.

There was a hunt for Mrs. Sweech ; but that good woman never came back to Bristol, and was not found until two or three years afterwards, when she was recognised among the pauper lunatics of a workhouse near London. Her brutalities were

then ascribed, in mercy, but perhaps without much reason, to incipient insanity.

As Hannah had predicted, Mary Gold became Jack Mallory's wife before the summer was over. She would not have the grand wedding Lady Liliass wanted to give her; and so afraid were she and Jack of the rice and the slippers, the bouquets and the favours, with which they were threatened, that they gave out one date for their intended marriage, and then meanly sneaked into the church and got married the day before, with nobody there but little Greville, who stood on a hassock to give the bride away.

And it was certainly less of an ordeal for the contracting parties than was the elaborate "function," with huge wedding cakes, dozens of sets of silver salt-cellars, cartloads of flowers, and hundreds of spectators, which gave the neighbourhood something to talk about in the following Spring, when Lady Liliass married her old love, Geoffrey Wilmer.

Poor little Greville felt rather forlorn when, as he said, "both his mamas" had got married. He thrust his little hand into that of his grandmother, when the newly-married pair had started on their journey, and said—

"I shall have to marry you, grandma, now, sha'n't I?"

And old Lady Shelvin, bending down to caress the head of the boy to whom she could refuse

nothing, gravely told him she would have no other husband.

So he pulled up the blind to let in the sunshine on the carved mantelpiece, where the caryatides stared at them with the old stony stare, on the tapestried walls, and on the rings that sparkled on the old lady's waxen hands. And he brought "The History of Robinson Crusoe," and read portions of it aloud, sitting on a stool at her feet, as he had once sat at Mary's in the little garret sitting-room.

Greville was quite happy. But he thought to himself, as he glanced around him at the beautiful objects on every side, that after all he had felt just as happy with Mary in the garret, and with the old tabby cat on his knee in his little willow-green chair.

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